ORITTEN IN RED

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WRITTEN IN RED

OR

THE CONSPIRACY IN THE NORTH CASE

(A STORY OF BOSTON)

BY

CHAS. HOWARD MONTAGUE

AND

C. W. DYAR

BRENTANO'S

UNION SQUARE NEW YORK

1900

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WRITTEN IN RED;

OR, THE CONSPIRACY IN THE NORTH CASE.

CHAPTER I.

FOUND DEAD.

THE private office of North & Stackhouse, State Street, bankers and brokers, contained on the morning of Friday, June 16, 1887, a group of anxious and excited men, whose conversation plainly indicated that their uneasiness was caused by the continued and unexplained absence of Paul North, the senior partner.

In State Street circles, North & Stackhouse were classed among the "plungers." For the first two years of the firm's existence, indeed, there had been but slight departure from the conservative policy followed by Mr. North, who, when in the brokerage business on his own account, had been content with a modest office in a comparatively quiet street leading eastward from Post Office Square.

But, under the lead of Mr. Stackhouse—an energetic man of forty, ten years his partner's junior—banking had been added to brokerage; and the firm had become widely known as the promoter of many daring enterprises.

Nicaragua Midland was a speciality with North & Stackhouse. In season and out of season, Nicaragua Midland had been "boomed" with a persistency that caused some of the older magnates of "the street" to shake their heads ominously, but which had attracted, nevertheless, the admiration and co-operation of a multitude of people.

Not all who invested their earnings under the advice of North & Stackhouse had, it is true, found the venture profitable.

But, for the most part, the losers had borne their ill fortune manfully, without complaining. Few angry outbursts from disappointed patrons had disturbed the optimistic hopes of the bright-eyed speculators, who, month after month, had made the rooms of these State Street bankers and brokers their favorite haunt.

Twelve days previous to this June morning in 1887, however, a curious letter, in an unknown hand, had been laid on Mr. North's desk. The writing was an odd sort of scrawl, uncertain in its lines, but legible enough. This was the missive:

"My Dear Sir.—I am a desperate man, ruined by your manipulations of the property entrusted to your hands. I must have money enough to begin life again. I only ask for a little back out of all you robbed me of, but that little I must have. There is only one thing for you to do: Draw a check, for one thousand dollars, payable to bearer, and enclose it addressed to me at the post office, Boston. If you fail in this, I swear to shoot you down as I would a mad dog. If you are wise, you will not refer this matter to the police. That act would be your death warrant. "Daniel Stickney."

Paul North, to whom, personally, this threatening letter was addressed, had consulted his partner, in some little uneasiness of mind.

"It's all nonsense," Mr. Stackhouse had said, confidently. "A mere practical joke of some broker who wants to frighten you. A few of them were nipped in the last turn of the market in our favor, you know, and perhaps they hold North & Stackhouse responsible. But, if the matter disturbs you at all, why, turn the letter over to the police. They'll attend to it. We must look after Nicaragua Midland very sharply this week, North, and have no time to bother our heads about trifles."

Nevertheless, Mr. North had troubled himself about the matter sufficiently to put the letter into the hands of Inspector Applebee for such action as seemed proper.

Upon the advice of that quietly efficient personage, a decoy letter had been written by Mr. North, enclosing a check for 1000 dollars, payable to bearer.

An officer, in citizen's clothes, had been stationed on duty constantly at the post office, but no Daniel Stickney had called for the letter addressed to his name.

As a precaution against any possible oversight, payment of the check had been stopped at the bank, a precaution which, thus far, had proved equally useless.

"Just as I told you," Stackhouse had said to his

partner after a few days. "A broker's practical joke."

The letter soon passed out of mind, for business cares weighed heavily on both partners.

What had long been feared had taken place. The market had become very "bearish." All stocks felt the mysterious influence of depression, and among the very first to fall was Nicaragua Midland.

So absorbed and anxious had Mr. North become that he could talk and think of little except the market and its prospects.

Was it altogether on the subject of Nicaragua Midland that he had held conference, late in the afternoon of the 15th of June, with one of the chief investors, though not a director in the Nicaragua Midland—Mr. Richard Fetridge?

Whether or not, the interview had not been finished at the office; for the two men had been seen to walk away together, still talking earnestly.

Old Jobson, the veteran clerk of the firm, had looked after them as they passed up the street.

"It's a tight time for North & Stackhouse," he had said to himself, shaking his head. "If things don't take an upward turn very soon, I'm afraid to-morrow's meeting of Nicaragua directors will do precious little good!"

The junior partner had left the office hours before, outwardly calm. Whatever his forbodings may have been, Thornton Stackhouse was not the man to allow his troubles to show themselves in look or manner.

Paul North was the father-in-law of his business associate, and Thornton Stackhouse made his home in summer time at Mr. North's spacious villa at Swampscott, from whose broad windows the occupants enjoyed an exhilarating prospect of the sail-flecked ocean.

At ten o'clock in the morning of this Friday, the 16th of June, the directors of Nicaragua Midland had assembled, pursuant to call, in the office of North & Stackhouse. Half an hour later every face wore a look of anxious expectation.

"I don't understand it at all," exclaimed Stackhouse, nervously walking up and down. "North is the most punctual of men, as you all know. He must be ill."

"Ill!" echoed one of the directors. "Wasn't North all right when you left him at Swampscott this morning?"

Mr. Stackhouse waved his hand impatiently.

"I didn't go down to the shore last night," he returned, shortly. "Stayed in town with a friend. I left North here in this office about three o'clock in the afternoon, and haven't laid eyes on him since!"

"Why don't you telegraph to his house?" asked a little man near the door. "It's strange he hasn't sent some word himself before this time. But I suppose he's ill, and his daughters are so worried about him that they have forgotten to send. Just like women!" the testy little bachelor added.

The suggestion was acted upon instantly. After

an interminable delay a response came, evoking a simultaneous murmur of dismay and the interchange of apprehensive looks.

"SWAMPSCOTT, June 16.

"Mr. North must have stayed in town. He has not been here since yesterday morning. "COMFORT HARWOOD."

"Strange!" ejaculated Stackhouse, ringing the bell as he spoke. "Send Mr. Jobson in," he added, the next moment, to the waiting messenger.

The old clerk was in the room before the messenger had left it, trembling all over with senile agitation.

"At what time did Mr. North leave the office yesterday afternoon?" Stackhouse demanded abruptly.

"It was after five o'clock, sir."

"Was he alone?"

"No, sir. Mr. Fetridge was with him."

"Probably went out of town somewhere with Fetridge," suggested one of the directors. "Delayed —missed a train. Very provoking! On this day, too, of all others! But send round to Fetridge's office and see if he has been heard from."

Unasked, the old clerk took upon himself the duty of messenger, and the party anxiously awaited his return. But one question and answer were interchanged meanwhile.

"Has Nicaragua been quoted to-day, Stackhouse?" the little old bachelor queried.

"Yes. Offered at 9. No takers. Off a point already, you see."

The sound of footsteps and voices in the outer office announced to the anxious ear of Stackhouse the coming of Mr. Fetridge himself. The broker stepped forward.

"Well?"

It was evident at first sight that the new comer was unduly agitated. He was a stalwart, handsome fellow, certainly not beyond thirty years of age.

"I cannot imagine where North is any more than you," he exclaimed, without waiting for question. "I walked up the street with him yesterday afternoon, after a talk in his office."

"Where did you leave him?"

Fetridge flushed and seemed considering a reply. All eyes were turned on him.

"I don't know the exact point," he said at last. "At the corner of State and Washington Streets, I think it was."

Stackhouse, who was very nervous and more affected than the occasion seemed to require, stared at Fetridge blankly, as if utterly at a loss to account for his confusion.

"His town house is closed for the summer," he suggested, his eyes still on Fetridge's face. "He must have gone to some hotel."

"Send a messenger to make the rounds!" excitedly demanded the little bachelor.

Richard Fetridge seemed to find the situation unaccountably embarrassing. He had no advice to offer. Stackhouse particularly appeared to disconcert him. Murmuring something about having

left a man waiting for him at his office, and that he presumed North would be found speedily, he hastened out and betook himself in the direction of his place of business. The necessity of haste in his return, however, seemed to become less obvious to him after he reached the open air. He stood stock still with his foot upon the flight of stairs leading to his office, and then, under the stress of a sudden thought, wheeled abruptly and walked energetically back up the street.

In five minutes he was in police headquarters at Pemberton Square, inquiring anxiously of the official to whom the clerk referred him whether any notification of the disappearance of Paul North had been sent to him. The official professed ignorance of the matter.

"When was he last seen, sir?"

"Yesterday afternoon about five o'clock, going up State Street from his office," Fetridge rejoined, avoiding further detail. And hastened to add: "He has a town house at — Marlboro Street, you know. Perhaps it isn't my place to suggest it, but don't the police in such cases have authority to enter a man's premises if—"

Fetridge hesitated. The official observed him narrowly, wondering, no doubt, why he was so obviously agitated.

"Undoubtedly; if his friends desired it, and had any reason to believe that there was anything the matter, the police would enter the house."

Fetridge thereupon urged the official to obtain

permission from Thornton Stackhouse to make a search of the premises. He was unable to give any direct reason, and unwilling to put into words any definite suspicion, but he showed by his conduct that he had both. Eventually a messenger was despatched in search of Stackhouse, who thereupon responded in person. He seemed a little surprised to see Fetridge, and the official noted that there was a constrainedness and a lack of cordiality between the two men. Their opinions, however, coincided upon the matter in question.

"By all means," said Stackhouse, "search the house in Marlboro Street. It is my residence as well as North's, and I authorize you—if the men sent are discreet and trustworthy."

The official arose.

"Then I will send word at once by telephone to Station 4. You don't happen to have a key to the house about you?"

"Why, no," returned the partner. "My keys are in my wife's care at Swampscott, or I should have gone to the house myself."

The message was sent, and while the police of the fourth division were acting in accordance therewith, Stackhouse and Fetridge sat waiting at headquarters, the quiet broken only by the scratching of the busy pen of a clerk.

No. — Marlboro Street was a broad, brown house, the counterpart of half a hundred other dwellings within a stone's throw of Paul North's town residence.

As the sergeant and patrolman of the fourth division neared the place, they observed the outer door at the entrance, and saw that all the windows in the basement and first story were barred or shuttered. Curtains, closely drawn, lent a cheerless and deserted appearance to the windows above.

"And yet," remarked the sergeant, as he went up the steps, "somebody has been here. The outer door is open; the vestibule door unlocked."

It was indeed true, and led at once to the conclusion that Paul North was within.

The officer rang the bell. But though the summons was repeated again and again it awoke no responsive life inside the darkened, echoing house. The sergeant calmly came to the conclusion that an entrance must be forced, and after a brief inspection of the premises sent Johnson, the officer, in quest of a ladder. The ladder was obtained from the nearest depository of the fire department; and the officers were soon in the rear of Paul North's residence.

It took but a minute to open the door of the yard. In another minute the ladder rested against a brick wall, and Officer Johnson, with a curious piece of flexible steel in his grasp, had pushed back the lock of a curtained window in the second story.

"A bedroom," said the sergeant, pulling up the curtain with some difficulty, when they were both inside; "bed untouched, however. Door open into that dark room in front. Other door open—to the corridor, no doubt."

The sergeant led the way through a door diagonally opposite the window by which they had gained entrance.

It was the corridor, as he had expected. He set out methodically to peer into the rooms as he went along, but he met with an obstacle at the very outset.

At the head of the broad front staircase the door refused to yield to his pressure beyond a limited degree. Officer Johnson was about to push the door vigorously when he was stopped by a warning gesture from his superior.

As the patrolman stepped back the sergeant, pressing against the door as lightly as possible, insinuated his way into the unvisited room. A half-stifled cry brought his subordinate to his side.

"Don't move it! Don't touch it!" whispered the sergeant, putting an admonitory hand on the officer's shoulder. It was by no means horror which inspired his utterance. Both men looked down upon a figure, lying with outstretched, clutching hands, close against the door.

With the caution of experience the sergeant bent down, and placed his hand over the heart.

"Dead!" he said in a moment, half to himself, half to his companion, and straightened up without losing his composure.

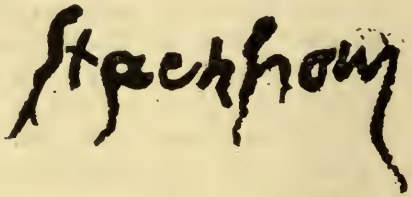
Officer Johnson, new to the force and to this kind of experience, by no means preserved his presence of mind in the emergency, and held fast to the sergeant.

The room, seen through the twilight, had a weird, uncanny look; the tables, enswathed in their coverings, seemed coffin shaped, and the chandelier, in its shroud of brown holland, might have been a ghost pointing down to the inanimate figure on the floor.

"What's that on the wall by the door?" whispered Officer Johnson, pointing with shaking finger.

The sergeant had opened the window almost before his companion had finished the sentence.

In the glare of the sudden instreaming sunlight on the tinted wall, low down, near the door by which the body lay, was a scrawl in dull red:



"Stockhart—Stockhaus—Stockhouj!"

Thus the sergeant, as they both stared with all their eyes.

"There's a 'Stack,' or 'Stock,' written there," said the officer, positively. "Whatever the rest may mean, that much is certain."

He was still gazing at the message when he received a peremptory order to proceed to the station and notify the authorities.

"For there's a hue and cry coming out of this thing, or I'm no prophet," the sergeant said.

And as he waited for the coming of his associates the sergeant looked down thoughfully at the silent figure. What an uproar and commotion in the community would follow this discovery, so quietly made in the silent chamber! The sergeant was philosopher enough in his way to think of this and to mutter to himself as he kept his lonely watch:

"Within twenty-four hours, for all you lie there so silent and utter no sound, the thoughts and conjectures of a million people will center about you, and Heaven knows how many lives and loves you will make and break before you are through with them!"

The sergeant was quite right. The arm of a dead man may have a tremendous power to threaten and control, and Paul North dead might work more mischief still than Paul North living.

CHAPTER II.

A PERFUME—AS OF A WOMAN.

PHILOSOPHICALLY reflecting, Sergeant Parr continued, nevertheless, a careful scrutiny of the apartment. It was beyond doubt a library, for the backs of books showed behind the sheets that covered certain articles of large bulk. The adjoining room was in all probability the sleeping chamber of the master of the house. A casual inspection satisfied the officer that the bed had not been occupied since it was last made up.

But there was something more important still in the sergeant's estimation to be ascertained, and on that he had ample time to reach a settled conviction. It was evident at first sight that the man on the floor had come to his death by reason of a bullet wound. If his own hand had been responsible for the deed, the suicidal weapon must be somewhere about. And as a careful search failed to reveal any trace of such a weapon, the sergeant had made up his mind long previous to the arrival of the investigating party that the case was a very serious one and involved at the outset a deep mystery.

The scene soon changed. The room gradually

filled with alert and dignified men, whose profession made their attendance at such times a matter of too frequent occurrence to permit of their exhibiting any other sentiment in the presence of the grim witness of violent death than a keen and speculative business interest. In the vestibule below, two officers were stationed to challenge everybody who attempted to enter the house. Already in front of the building, so quickly and mysteriously does evil news disseminate itself, was gathered a throng which stared with fascinated horror at the upper windows and at every fresh ingoer and outcomer.

Sergt. Parr had long since recognized Inspector Applebee, and had whispered in his ear that it was going to be a "big case."

"So?" said the inspector, lifting his eye-brows and half smiling. A moment later he was grave and apparently unconcerned.

Dr. Jarret, the medical examiner for the district in which the body was found, came to the scene in a carriage. Till he arrived nothing was done. The State imposes upon the judgment and good sense of these officials grave responsibilities. In three minutes after his horse stopped in front of the house, Dr. Jarrett was at work examining, questioning, weighing the evidences in his own mind.

The casual observer would have looked in vain among these quiet officials for the inevitable reporter. Evidently the newspaper man was barred out! Not at all. The public who look for a notebook, and expect to find in such circumstances a meddlesome

young man writing with ghoul-like activity, would never have suspected the short, thick-set, black-haired, gentlemanly young man who talked with each person present in an easy way, which showed that he was personally acquainted with every one. Instead of flourishing a notebook—the insignia of the property reporter of the theater, and of the beginners in the profession—this man had no better use for his hands than a mechanical fondling of the pendant to his watch chain—a trick which in some mysterious manner seemed to help him to think. Although he was young, his experience in criminal affairs, combined with his natural ability, had made his sagacity equal to that of anybody present, while his trustworthiness and reliability enabled him to be oftentimes in important cases a confidant of the authorities. This was Kingman F. Thomas of the *Boston Globe.*

The medical examiner arose from a brief inspection of the body, which was already identified as that of Paul North, the State Street financier. Everybody looked at him curiously, but his imperturbable face told no tales.

"Nothing has been disturbed?" he asked of the sergeant.

"We knew our business, sir. Everything is exactly as we found it."

"Ah!" No more and no less, came in a matter-of-fact tone from the medical examiner's lips.

"Well, doctor," said Mr. Thomas, "how is it?"

"I shall perform an autopsy."

This was said quietly. The medical examiner refrained from advancing his opinion at this stage, but Thomas understood that the determination to perform an autopsy indicated serious suspicion on the physician's part.

There was a tremulous touch on his shoulder, and he turned to meet the eyes of a man whom he did not know.

"What—what is that writing on the wall down there by the door?" asked a shaking voice.

"This is a friend of the family, doctor," interposed Inspector Applebee, by way of accounting for this unfamiliar presence there. "He was Mr. North's partner. Naturally he is very much overcome."

In tones that were a trifle steadier, Mr. Stackhouse repeated his question. Bending down to seek an answer himself, he started back, and would have fallen but for the opportune aid of the newspaper man.

"A horrible sight! I cannot look at it," he muttered, putting his hand over his eyes. "Tell me what you make it out!"

A glance of intelligence passed between the inspector and the sergeant. Each divined perfectly what had brought such a shock to the mind of Paul North's partner. Each understood fully the man's unspoken fear.

Meanwhile Dr. Jarret, applying certain mysterious tests, seemed more intent upon determining

the medium of this strange message than the message itself.

"Written in blood," he said, eventually, looking steadily at Stackhouse; "and the condition of the forefinger of the right hand seems to indicate that the dead man wrote it." He paused and Stackhouse sank into a chair. "But what odds? The writing will endure, gentlemen. We have other things to do."

He gave the inspector a meaning look and resumed his work. Thomas lost not a detail of this scene.

But now, with Inspector Applebee as his close companion, the library and the adjoining room were examined minutely.

The room had been used very recently. Regarding that point, there was no possibility of doubt.

Chairs had been moved from their accustomed places. On the opened desk, which Mr. Stackhouse at once identified as his partner's, stood, amid a heap of tumbled papers, a drop light. Near by, a burnt match. Obviously the windows had not been touched.

The adjoining room, vouched for as Paul North's chamber by his partner, soon recovering his self-control, bore no traces of occupancy. As the door was open between it and the library, it was plain that the master of the house must have passed through the room. He had not slept there, for the bed's surface was unruffled, and not a fold of the pillows had been disturbed.

"One thing is evident," said Thomas. "This man was not killed for money. I saw the doctor take a well-filled pocket-book from his person, and not a thing in the house appears to have been disturbed."

A call from Dr. Jarrett summoned the two men back into the chamber of death.

"You had better look for the bullet, gentlemen," he said quietly. "It is evident that it went clear through him, and it is surely nowhere about his clothing."

Instantly everybody was examining the room, the furniture, the walls, the carpet. But for some time, it appeared that the ball had been spirited away as mysteriously as the fatal weapon from which it had been fired.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Thomas, suddenly, as he pointed to the wall, "what's that up there above that picture?"

Thomas was pointing to a slight protuberance in the surface of the wall, directly opposite the bay-window, near the ceiling.

"What, that?" exclaimed the inspector. "Impossible! It is quite ten feet away from the floor."

"But it's a bullet, none the less," said Thomas, who had already mounted on a chair and began to ascertain the distance of the puncture above the carpet.

"You are right, inspector," he said. "It is nine feet eleven inches from the floor, and is driven in diagonally, as if it had been fired from the corner

of the bay-window over there near the writing-desk."

"I can't understand that at all," said the inspector. "It must have been deflected in its course somehow to have got there. The man was evidently shot in the breast. His clothes in front are simply one mass of blood. Ah! I see there was more than one shot fired. This is a stray ball."

The house was searched from top to bottom. Nowhere was any trace of intrusion.

"If Mr. North slept here at all last night," said the inspector, "it must have been in his chair in his library."

Dr. Jarrett assented. Sergeant Parr, who had been notified from the fourth division that he need no longer remain on duty in the place, willingly volunteered to take, as he went out, a message to the captain in charge of the division.

"I have sent for an ambulance," Dr. Jarrett explained to the group that surrounded him in Paul North's chamber. "The body will be taken to the morgue, and I will hold an autopsy at once. As Mr. North's partner is here, I will waive the usual formalities and state beforehand that there is little doubt that an inquest will take place, though I would ask reporters not to make any such direct announcement."

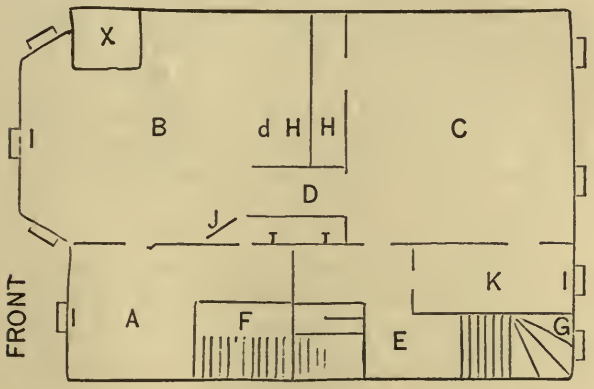
Mr. Stackhouse bowed.

"I quite understand, sir," he said, "and whatever testimony I can give I shall offer most willingly. But now I feel that I should take the terrible news

to the family—my wife, you know, was Mr. North's daughter."

As Mr. Stackhouse went his way up the shady side of Marlboro Street, an initiated observer would hardly have failed to note that another man followed in his wake upon the opposite pavement.

The quiet reporter meanwhile had busied himself in making a diagram of the second story of the North house, which appeared the next morning in his paper in substantially the following form:



PLAN II. STORY.

HOUSE FRONTS ON MARLBORO STREET.

A—Hall bedroom used by Mr. North since wife's death. *B*—Mr. North's library. *C*—Back bedroom opening into hall opposite head of front stairs (*F*), and connecting with library through wash room (*D*), and with toilet room (*K*). *E*—Hall connecting front and back stairs. *F*—Front stairs. *G*—Back stairs. *H*—Closet. *I*—Windows. *J*—Spot where body of Mr. North was found. *X*—Writing desk. *d*—Point in wall where the bullet was found.

Thomas sat cross-legged on one of the chairs in the unoccupied chamber through which the officers had originally entered, making a rough sketch on the back of an envelope with a stubby pencil, when he was slightly startled by the unexpected presence of a man at his elbow.

"Well, Thomas?"

"Ah, inspector."

"How does it look to you?"

"Queer."

"What are you going to say about it?"

"That it's a dead mystery—unless we make some unexpected discovery in the next half hour."

"Well, may be you're right. May be."

"It's no suicide," said Thomas, affably; "that's plain enough. And as there has been no robbery, it doesn't appear as yet why he should have been killed."

"No?"

"But of course you have your theory already?"

"When it comes to the matter of theories," returned Applebee, mischievously, "a plain policeman like myself can't hold a candle to you newspaper fellows."

"I see, you don't intend to answer questions," said Thomas. "I suppose I may state that the police are already on the track of the murderer, and that important arrests are momentarily expected?"

"State what you please. You will, any way," the inspector returned, with a slight frown. "No,

I didn't come to answer questions, as you say. I came to ask them."

"Better than nothing. What are they?"

"In the first place, did you know North?"

"Just to the same extent that I know hundreds of men. I have seen him, talked with him—you know how and where."

"In the line of your work, you mean?"

"Exactly. He was what I call a professional acquaintance. When we met in a crowd I saw North, the wealthy broker; but he saw only—the crowd. Poor fellow! with all his resources he couldn't stop that bullet. Meantime, nobody thinks it worth while to shoot simple K. F. Thomas."

"Well, I doubt that, too. I've heard the proposition seriously discussed at headquarters. Joking aside, what does rumor say about North's private life? Was he still young in spite of his fifty years, or was he one of your quiet stay-at-homes?"

"So far as rumor reached me, he was a business man and nothing else. Anybody that ever saw Paul North, it seems to me, would say that he was too much engrossed in his life-long chase of the almighty dollar to have time for follies."

"Then, as to his family?"

"They tell me he has two daughters; both beauties. I never saw them, however. His wife, I believe, is dead."

"How did he stand in financial circles?"

Thomas uttered a contemptuous laugh.

"North & Stackhouse? Ask any broker."

"Bad?"

"Better put it that they showed too much enterprise to please conservative business men. That's the most charitable construction I can put on it."

"You didn't invest anything in their railroad, did you, Thomas?" the inspector asked, quizzically.

"Did I? No, sir. I'm not Jay Gould, and, if I had been, I should have known enough to have kept out of Nicaragua Midland. That was a fraud, inspector; one of those frauds you can suspect, but never prove; one of the numerous 'suppressed' stories kept on file in a newspaper office; one of the truths you can't print because it would libel some high-toned rascal whom the law is framed to protect!"

"Hump! You have not a very high opinion of North & Stackhouse?"

Thomas shrugged his shoulders.

"Socially, they're gentlemen. Men who handle millions can never come down to the level of common thieves."

"They must be, then, enormously rich?"

"On the contrary; they are regarded as extremely shaky."

"So? And what have they done with these millions?"

"Got caught in their own trap. An unexpected twist in the market burnt their hands off. Oh, it's all the same in stocks. You can think yourself

ever so clever—but I'm talking too much, inspector. I am saying things on my mere surmises that no newspaper would dare to print. Still, you wanted my opinion, and you have it. It would be of no use, I suppose, to ask yours in return?"

Thomas gave Applebee a keen look, under the influence of which the inspector momentarily closed his eyes, as if afraid that the reporter might surprise his thoughts there.

"Some clients of North & Stackhouse have no very pleasant feelings towards them, I presume, on account of this Nicaragua scheme?" he adroitly queried, as if to change the subject. It was adroit for that reason. While appearing to avoid a direct answer, he was, in reality, putting the very question which he desired to have answered.

Did the reporter suspect? There was not the faintest indication, either in his manner or in his quiet reply, that he did.

"Some of the poor fools who invested their money in that scheme would very likely hold the firm morally responsible for ruining them."

"Ah!" said the inspector, as he turned away. "I suppose so. But I'm forgetting my case in listening to you."

The fact was, Inspector Applebee was endeavoring to establish some connection between the anonymous threatening letter which, ten days before, had been placed in his hands by the late Paul North, and this violent death.

"But, in that case," he thought, "why has not

the money been called for at the post office? Is it possible that the writer of that letter was in a position to know that the matter had been placed in my hands? I must move cautiously in this affair or ruin it at the outset."

Not long after Mr. Thomas's departure, most of Applebee's associates left the house, the medical examiner going first of all.

Paul North's body had been taken away in the undertaker's wagon, but the inspector and one officer still remained on the premises.

Quite by accident, as he was coming down the staircase which connected the library floor with the story above, after a prowl through the darkened rooms in the upper part of the house, the inspector's eye caught the gleam of something white.

He picked it up.

It was a tiny lace handkerchief, such as a dainty woman often carries, but a man never. This was the thought that flashed through the inspector's mind, to give place instantly to another.

That subtle, delicate perfume! In all his long experience Inspector Applebee had never inhaled its like.

"Ah!" he thought as he held up the filmy lace and looked at it more closely. "But I might have known it from the first. A woman in the case!"

He pressed it again to his nose and put it carefully away in a pocket-book. On second thought he removed it, and made doubly sure of retaining

the perfume by wrapping it in heavy glazed writing paper.

"Some day," he reflected, "I may meet this scent somewhere, and it will be better not to have to trust to my memory to recall it."

CHAPTER III.

MR. LAMM ASSUMES COMPLICATED RELATIONS.

ABOUT two o'clock in the afternoon of the day Paul North was found dead, Detective Lamm, pursuing the even contemplative tenor of his way by the old Granary burying ground, found himself suddenly arm in arm with an excited gentleman whose face he did not recall.

"Mr. Lamm?" questioned Mr. Richard Fetridge.

"That is my name, sir."

"Excuse me. I know you. I need your service at once. I have unlimited money at my disposal. You have been recommended to me by trusted friends as most discreet in your calling. Come with me!"

And without giving Mr. Lamm time to make demur to these hurried, disjointed remarks, Richard Fetridge, still with the detective's arm in his grasp, hurried him down Tremont Street, up Beacon Street and Somerset Street, and so into Pemberton Square. If Detective Lamm had a momentary suspicion that this imperative gentleman was demented, a sidelong glance reassured him on that point. He had made physiognomy a study, and in

his companion's face he read not lunacy, but unusual excitement.

The two were in Mr. Fetridge's private office, and the door secured against intrusion before Detective Lamm's *vis-à-vis* declared himself.

"Pardon my abruptness," said Fetridge. "Pressing business must be my excuse. Not to waste time in preambles, Detective Lamm, I want to retain your services in a matter of vital interest to me. You shall fix the amount of compensation yourself. Now will you undertake this service?"

Mr. Lamm looked at him calmly. "That depends somewhat upon the nature of the business in hand," he said drily.

"Oh, it's perfectly legitimate," went on Mr. Fetridge. "It's this terrible murder in Marlboro Street—the killing of Paul North. He was my friend; I am on intimate terms with the family, and I wish to be kept fully posted on the progress of the work of detecting the guilty party."

"Umha! You have a keen interest in this matter, sir!"

"Why, detective," said Fetridge, edging his chair closer, "I have good reason to be eager in this matter. As man to man, I tell you here that I believe the guilty man in this case to be Paul North's partner!"

The detective remained utterly unmoved, but grave and attentive.

"Mr. Thornton Stackhouse?"

"Of course," said Fetridge quickly, "I make

this statement absolutely in confidence. I wouldn't condemn the man publicly on my simple suspicions."

"Oh, of course not."

"But I tell you, sir," Fetridge resumed, pacing the floor excitedly, "I know the man to be a villain. I know him for a scoundrel, and—good heavens! Poor North! Poor Marion! What a misfortune!"

A man more agitated than Mr. Richard Fetridge over a similar affair certainly had never fallen under Detective Lamm's observation. He dropped suddenly into a chair, and was pressing his hands against his temples as if to still the throbbings of a violent headache. The detective watched him under his eyebrows. Now that he knew his name he remembered that he had heard of him as a young lawyer who had recently fallen heir to a large fortune, and it seemed to him too that he could dimly recall having heard him referred to as the Apollo Belvidere of State Street.

"You will, of course, acquaint me with the reasons for your suspicions?" Mr. Lamm mildly suggested, by way of bringing his now motionless client to a realization of his surroundings. Fetridge awoke from his trance with a start.

"Reasons?" he echoed. "No! Certainly not! Why should I?"

"It might be well for me to have something to work on at the start, Mr. Fetridge."

Fetridge was now on his feet again, and took

two or three turns up and down the apartment in thoughtful silence.

"No," he said at last, pausing in front of the detective. "No, I see no reason for telling you—not yet, certainly. It would not aid you in the least. It would simply convince you that Stackhouse might have had a motive, and a strong one. As for anything else, you would be left as much in the dark as I am."

"I would urge upon you—"

"It is useless," interrupted Fetridge. "There are family reasons for my silence. I am a friend of the family. Why, if it hadn't been so I should have gone at once with all I know to the police. But there are some things, Lamm, which the least said about the better—and Stackhouse's incentive to this deed of violence is one of them."

"Umha" (the detective had a habit of prefacing his discourse with this reflective grunt), "North had quite a family?"

"He has two daughters, sir."

Fetridge had resumed his walk.

"Young? Unmarried?"

"What? Don't you know? The eldest, Marion, is Thornton Stackhouse's wife. The younger, Stella, is seventeen."

"And Mrs. North?"

"Dead these fifteen years. Her sister, Comfort Harwood, is the housekeeper. The family are at the beach at Swampscott—still, I presume, in ignorance of the awful cloud which is hanging over

them. Poor girls! Poor old Aunt Comfort! I say, Lamm, you'll undertake the case, wont you? If there's any disgrace I can save this bereaved family, I am bound to do it. I want to employ you to hunt up evidence in behalf of the family, and to report to me as rapidly as possible. In fact, I wish to know, if it can be done, all the evidence the police have when the inquest is called. I wont conceal from you that the attitude I shall take on that occasion may be governed largely by what you tell me. And, by the way, when is the inquest likely to be held?"

"It is a delay of days or weeks, as the police determine."

"Very well, and in the meantime I may count upon your undivided services. You understand what I want. I am always at my office here, or you may telegraph me at the Beach. Whenever there is any development in this sad affair, I desire to know it with as brief delay as possible, whether it helps or hinders my suspicions of Stackhouse in the case is not to the present purpose. Facts are what I wish to ascertain; and there is nobody who can arrive at the facts more surely or more quickly than you—and this is not flattery, either!"

Mr. Lamm made a deprecatory gesture.

"Well, Mr. Fetridge, no man can make a fairer offer than you've made, and under the circumstances I'll be very glad to take up the case and see what I can make of it. Count upon me to let you

know when I have found anything of the slightest value."

"I certainly shall, detective," returned Fetridge, whose face expressed the satisfaction he felt at securing such an ally. And so the conference ended.

Detective Lamm, now turning his steps towards his own office, not far away, bethought himself that this man Stackhouse, whom he knew very well by sight, would be likely to occupy a large share of his time and attention for many days to come.

It came as a surprise, even to his imperturbable nature, to find that the first face to look into his as he entered his office was the face of Thornton Stackhouse. But Detective Lamm was quite equal to the occasion.

"Were you waiting to see me?" he asked, in his most matter-of-fact tones. A quick look had assured him that the banker, though less excited in manner than his recent client, was certainly not positively free from agitation.

"Yes," said Mr. Stackhouse, taking a chair in response to the detective's beckoning invitation. "My name is Thornton Stackhouse. I have come almost directly from the house of my partner, Paul North. You know, of course, about his death—his murder?"

Mr. Lamm bowed, twirling a pen between his fingers, and waited for his companion to continue.

"Perhaps I need not recount all the circumstances, detective, that combine to make this a very

difficult and delicate case. You will readily understand, without my saying anything further, that the very best and most confidential advice is requisite. And that is precisely why I came here, Mr. Lamm, to enlist your services in getting at the facts—all the facts—of this mysterious crime. Now, can I secure you? There will be a handsome compensation—you will have all the time and money needed to carry on your investigation."

Detective Lamm, looking at the wall and still twirling his pen in his hands, seemed to be considering what engagements he had made with which this new commission might conflict. At least, such was the impression of Thornton Stackhouse.

"I don't know," the detective said slowly, at last. "I have a great deal of business just now—more than I can properly handle in fact. It depends upon what you want. Was there any particular point you wished to present to my attention, Mr. Stackhouse, or was it simply that you wished me to ascertain facts and report to you?"

Mr. Stackhouse looked at the door with some vague apprehension.

"We shall not be disturbed," said the detective; "I sprang the lock as I came in."

Mr. Stackhouse brought his chair close to the detective. When he spoke it was in very low tones, hardly above a whisper.

"Mr. Lamm, you may have read in the afternoon papers that a name was written on the wall close to where my partner lay dead."

A nod and a renewed twirling of the pen.

"That name, Mr. Lamm, was meant to be mine—was mine!"

The detective raised his eyebrows and seemed about to speak.

"You are going to ask me how I know," said Stackhouse. "Why, I read it with my own eyes. Yes, the papers said the scrawl might have meant Stick or Stock or Stockholm, and so on; but I had a keener and truer sight than the officers there.

"Now, detective, that name was written by some enemy of mine, who seeks to implicate me in this terrible affair. I am convinced of the fact. And, being so convinced, a man of your experience does not need to be told that I dismiss the idea that Paul North wrote that name on the wall as utterly out of the question."

The grave, listening face near his wore no look of surprise, as Mr. Lamm nodded his full understanding of his visitor's thought.

"North being put aside, we must look for the guilty party in another quarter. Mr. Lamm, you don't happen to recollect who it was at the meeting of Nicaragua directors, of which the papers published an account, testified that he parted with Paul North late yesterday afternoon?"

Mr. Lamm did not appear to recollect, for he pursed up his lips, shrugged his shoulders slightly, and said nothing.

"Well, detective, that man was Mr. Richard Fetridge, of whom you may have heard—a young

lawyer of considerable property who has had dealings with our firm."

"Richard Fetridge," repeated the detective slowly; "well?"

"Mr. Fetridge stated, after considerable hesitation, which I couldn't help noticing, that he left Mr. North about five o'clock, after a business interview with him at our office. What the nature of that conference between them was I can't say. Mr. Fetridge and I did not like each other, I'm free to say it, and latterly I fancied that he grew even more curt and unpleasant in his manner toward me than before. Not that I cared for that, you understand; I would not have given the matter a moment's thought but for this terrible affair. Nor even now, if Fetridge's strange conference, and his hesitancy about saying where he left Mr. North, were not put in a more peculiar light by certain other facts that have come to my knowledge."

"New facts?'

"Yes. Fetridge and North were seen together at a much later hour than five o'clock the afternoon of the murder."

The statement was made pointedly, and the detective gave evidence of interest.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Absolutely sure." Mr. Stackhouse's voice had sunk to a confidential whisper. "A business acquaintance whose word is beyond question has told me that he saw the two men walking up the

Public Gardens at seven o'clock last evening, going in the direction of Marlboro Street."

Lamm threw off the mask of reserve.

"And that is, to your mind, a most valuable, a most important, piece of evidence? In conjunction with Mr. Fetridge's conduct and course, you would consider it certainly very significant?"

"So significant," returned Stackhouse, "that but for the fact that I want to have the criminal so tangled in the mesh when he is caught that there can be no possible escape, I should before this have given the information to the police."

"Then your theory is—?" suggested the detective.

"What theory could a man have under the circumstances? Richard Fetridge gained my partner's confidence—got into the family on a friendly footing—saw it was of no use to keep up his scheme of 'working' poor Mr. North any further, enticed him to this interview and subsequent conference at his house, and there murdered him."

"Murdered him?" echoed Mr. Lamm, with not a shade of difference in the tone or his voice, quite as if he expected just such a revelation.

"Not only murdered him," Stackhouse went on, his voice now full and strong under the stress of excitement; "but tried to fasten the guilt of the crime upon me. Richard Fetridge wrote my name there in the blood of his victim—Richard Fetridge, and no other. I feel as certain of it as if I had been a witness of the deed. He is my enemy; I

have felt it for a long time, and in the hostility, and no doubt his dread lest his scheming with North should come to light through my examination of his affairs, he has done his utmost to discredit and dishonor me. Now you see why I want Richard Fetridge watched; why I want him followed at every step; why I want his guilt established by incontrovertible proof."

By this time, Stackhouse, with his fists clenched, was pacing the floor.

"First of all," said the detective, quietly observing Stackhouse under his eyebrows—"first of all, let us look at your own interests here. Perhaps you over-estimate the influence of that word written on the wall—your name, as you declare. No one else has asserted this openly, Mr. Stackhouse; but there have, no doubt, been whisperings to that effect, and it is the part of wisdom for you to silence, at once and effectually, any such charge, uttered, insinuated, or hinted at. You can, of course, prove your whereabouts at the time when the murder must have been committed?"

Mr. Lamm said this in a tone of business-like indifference.

"You mean—an alibi?" asked Stackhouse, with something more of hesitancy than had characterized his statements hitherto.

"Certainly."

"Well, Mr. Lamm, as we are on confidential terms, talking as man to man, I see no reason for

concealing the fact that my position as regards an alibi is a little peculiar."

"Indeed?" Mr. Lamm gave his pen another twirl.

"I went to Vercelli's about half-past six o'clock for dinner with Mr. Sparhawk, one of my business friends. He was obliged to take a train out of town on the Providence road, and, after the dinner, I walked up and down the Public Garden, smoking a contemplative cigar."

"Alone?"

"Yes. Just how long this might have taken I really cannot say."

"About what time did you finish your dinner?"

"Somewhere about half-past seven o'clock. After this little walk, to help digest my dinner, I went towards Washington Street again. Then—but why should I beat about the bush? The evening was on my hands, and I dropped in for a quiet little game with some friends at a house in Avory Street."

"Yes; I've heard of the place," said the detective dryly.

"There I stayed until it was getting nearly two o'clock, when I walked into the Adams House, and slept till breakfast."

"Umha!" Mr. Lamm seemed to be considering a point. "About what time did you visit the Avory Street house? It may be important as bearing on the question of alibi."

"Not until after nine. I can be sure of that, for

I distinctly remember hearing the bells ring at that hour while I was in the street."

"At all events," said the detective, "your friends can testify, if it should be necessary, through any complication of circumstances, when you joined your party, and how long you remained there?"

"Undoubtedly." Mr. Stackhouse sat a moment thinking in his turn. "I suppose no reliable opinion has yet been given as to the time when Paul North came to his end?" He looked a trifle uneasy as he put the question.

"We must await the report of the autopsy on that point," rejoined the detective. "It seems to be taken for granted that Mr. North died some time between 6 P.M. and 9 A.M. by the papers. Only the decision of the medical examiner, however, can have weight in the matter. If I can ascertain its drift in advance," added Mr. Lamm, as if struck by a sudden thought, "I will advise you at once."

"Then you really think you can undertake the case?" Stackhouse asked eagerly.

"I have decided to," said Lamm dryly. "I am very glad you came here, Mr. Stackhouse. I think I should have been led into serious error regarding this case if you had not come. However, it is all right. I shall make an exception to an almost unbroken business rule, and undertake the case for a few days at least. If I find I cannot continue the work, I will promptly notify you."

Evidently gratified at receiving this assurance, Stackhouse took his leave.

Left to himself, the detective indulged in a momentary relief of his feelings. He took up his hat, looked into it, smiled into it, and put it on his head. After this performance, he became as indifferent and serene as if the complication in which he had so readily involved himself were the commonest sort of experience with him. But, as a matter of fact, it was not. Mr. Lamm was not in the habit of working for both sides of a case at the same time, and he was only induced to break his rule in this instance by the sudden suspicion that Fetridge, not Stackhouse, was the criminal. He had strong objections to identifying himself with the cause of the murderer when he might be employed in the interests of justice.

"I'll soon find out," he said to himself, "which of you is the villain, and send in my resignation to that man at once."

But it did not prove to be such an easy task as Mr. Lamm had anticipated.

The detective left his office almost upon the heels of his second client, and, shadowing him a short distance, saw him enter a branch office of the Western Union Telegraph Company. It is a very strict rule with the company that despatches are to be considered confidential, and woe to the man who betrays this confidence and gets caught at it. But it is a pretty difficult thing to restrain a man from accommodating a friend when he is sure that the friend will never allow him to suffer thereby ; and so, through the courtesy of the operator, who was

upon Mr. Lamm's list of "availables," the despatch written by the junior partner was, soon after that gentleman's departure, in the hands of the detective. It was addressed to Comfort Harwood, Swampscott, and contained these words :

"Am very busy with matters growing out of sad event. Will come by five o'clock train to Phillips Beach."

The reading of this telegram modified John Lamm's plans. If he wished to shadow Stackhouse, there were two courses open to him. One was to follow him through all the details of his operation till he got to Swampscott, and the other was to anticipate his arrival there. He adopted the latter as the more promising.

"With all due respect to you, Mr. Fetridge," he said to himself, "I should like to begin the case with an understanding of the motive, and if it's a family affair, as you say, why the family will be a very good point to start at. Perhaps I shall find them less delicate than you are about it—who knows? For at such times emotional excitement loosens everybody's tongues."

He consulted a time-table and hastened to the railway station in Causeway Street. In fifteen minutes he was in the train going towards Swampscott.

He went into the smoking car, pulled out a cigar, and was soon lost in a cloud of smoke. The effort stimulated his ideas, and when he had got them in logical order he produced a capacious memorandum

book, and recorded therein with a stylographic pen a series of hieroglyphics. As the occasion for secrecy has long ago expired, Mr. Lamm's notes may be transcribed.

1. Stackhouse has no alibi between seven and nine of Thursday night. Get from medical examiner probable time of death.

2. Fetridge turns away when forced to speak about North's daughters. Is it Marion or Stella?

3. If Marion, is there any other reason necessary for enmity between two men?

With this brief indication of his train of thoughts, Mr. Lamm's record ceased.

Drawing from his pocket a scarcely dry copy of the paper containing the first chapter of the tragic mystery in which he was embarked, he ran his eye carefully through the meager details thus far published. He seemed pleased when he saw by whom the report was signed.

"K. F. Thomas? Indeed? I'll look him up at once. That fellow knows more people and their histories than a biographical dictionary. Perhaps he can tell me all I want to know about Richard Fetridge."

At this point in his soliloquy, Mr. Lamm could not repress a start of surprise. At that very instant, the man whose name was on his mind's lips entered the smoking car, and sat down in one of the forward seats.

"What the deuce is Fetridge going to Swamp-

scott for at this time of the day?" he asked himself.

And for reasons which he believed to be excellent, the detective folded his paper and hastened out of possible range of view of his client; unsatisfied till he had put the entire length of the train between them.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNBIDDEN GUEST.

IN the appearance of John Lamm, detective, as he rode towards Swampscott, there was nothing to denote his especial calling. He might have been a prosperous merchant or a consulting lawyer or a skillful civil engineer, so far as manner and bearing were concerned.

Firmness and executive ability, however, were characteristics that no one who looked attentively at the brown-haired, broad-shouldered, keen-eyed, stalwart man could possibly fail to note.

In his suave and gentlemanly manner, too, in his magnetism, his geniality, and his ability to become hail fellow well met with the most opposite social types, might be read the secret of his extraordinary success in the profession.

Alighting at the Phillips Beach station, with a large contingent of sojourners, Mr. Lamm appeared to be quite as familiar with the place as the rest of the hurrying throng.

In order to permit Fetridge to get well out of the way, he stopped to inquire of the station agent where the Norths lived.

"Just up the street, yonder," the agent replied.

"Sad news for them, isn't it? The whole household is upset. There's Moffet, their 'inside man,' now, on the platform, looking after the train."

In a moment Mr. Lamm was at the side of the bewildered Moffett, and talking to him as if he had known the portly man of bottles and carving knives all his life.

"I am glad to have met you," he said. "I was a friend of Mr. North, and take a great interest in the family. Poor girls! I couldn't bear to break in upon their grief, but I feel that at a time like this a friend should do something."

Moffett clutched his shoulder.

"Oh, sir," he whispered, with an aroma of something stimulating by the way of flavour for the words, "if you are a friend, you can't do better than come up to the house. I have been waiting here in hopes that Mr. Stackhouse would return. But he doesn't; and there they are at the house in a terrible condition, sir."

"Overcome by the sad news?" Mr. Lamm said, as they walked up the street.

"Oh, sir, there's been some trouble there. I don't know what—scenes between the women. They don't understand what to do, sir. The servants are all upset too. If it weren't for me, sir, nobody would think of going to watch for Mr. Stackhouse. It's his not coming that worries me, sir."

Moffett was ordinarily a very discreet man, but, under the excitement of the time, he recounted

such an extraordinary though incoherent story of what had taken place at the Norths' that Lamm was nonplussed at his disclosures, and was moved to consider seriously what was best to be done. Then came one of those inspirations which, by reason of their boldness and audacity, may lead either to great success or absolute disaster. Might he not enter the house unknown to its occupants?

It was indeed a bold thing to do—a thing which John Lamm, detective, would not do in any circumstances, but for his belief that Moffett's disjointed utterances implied a state of affairs that demanded investigation.

Yielding to the earnest wish of Moffett, the friend of the family entered the house through the servants' door, the "inside man" clinging to his arm with a nervous grasp.

Without delay, Mr. Lamm was escorted to the pantry-room by the portly Moffett, who moved lightly, though slowly. They entered this sanctuary of the "inside man" without meeting any of the household; for, of course, Moffett had the necessary keys.

It had been observed by Mr. Lamm that the "inside man" had been taking something for his stomach's sake; but the detective understood the strain under which the man had been laboring, and felt sure, from his appearance, that he was far from being addicted to strong drink.

Moffett had assumed an air of importance and profound mystery that would infallibly have

aroused comment and suspicion had he met any of the servants. But, fortunately, both were now in the pantry-room with the door locked.

The detective was accustomed to meet all sorts and conditions of men, but he found it hard to refrain from laughing outright at the change in Mr. Moffett's looks as he faced him, after the pantry-room door had been locked, and held up a warning finger. But he said solemnly:

"Moffett, you're a man of sense, therefore I make no long explanations, but tell you frankly at once that I am a representative of the authorities—don't start, Moffett—and am sent here in the interests of justice."

"Justice!" murmured the butler, looking helplessly at him.

"Here is my badge," continued the detective, throwing back his coat. "And now it is absolutely necessary, Moffett, that I should have the run of the house—watch, without anybody's suspecting the fact, all that goes on, and have an eye to affairs generally. I have come to you in this way, Moffett, because I've been told that you are a very discreet man. Unless you repeat what I have told you, nobody in the house need know of my remaining here, nor have any idea of the real object which brings me."

"But I don't like, sir," stammered the butler, who already began to tremble.

"You must like it, Moffett," emphasized the detective. "I don't wish to make any trouble or

take you in charge, but I am fully prepared to go as far as that if you are not sensible enough to see the reasonableness of my first proposal. There! I see by your look you understand the situation. Very good. Now, where is the best, the most central, place in the house, in which you can stow me, do you think, Moffett?"

The "inside man" of Mr. Paul North's establishment was a picture of perplexity and despair.

"Central place! Stow you!" he murmured helplessly, puffing like a fat porpoise; "but what will Miss Harwood say—and Mrs. Stackhouse, and—and—Mr. Stackhouse? No, no; it aint regular. I'm afraid it aint regular, sir."

"Oh, I guess you misunderstand me, Moffett; misunderstand me completely," said Mr. Lamm, calmly crossing his legs as he sat in the butler's chair. "It's to spare the ladies worry, trouble, and excitement that I came to you. I'll be frank with you; because I can easily see you're a man of discretion, and can keep a secret. I am expecting the murderer of Mr. North to call here, and I want to be where I can arrest him quietly and without undue excitement, which you wouldn't want yourself in a family like this, now, would you, Moffett?"

"But—but they—the servants—might know you're here. They may have seen you come in. They—"

"Oh, pshaw, Moffett, you can slam the front door, and if any questions are asked, you can say that I went out that way. Come, come, Moffett,

be a man. Don't shake so. Everything will be done quietly and in order, I can assure you."

"And this man, this murderer," stammered Moffett, who was well-nigh frightened out of his wits; "is he violent, sir? Wont he try to shoot somebody else? Wont he—I think, perhaps, if I went out down the street a little while so as not to be obliged to answer any questions—"

"An excellent idea, Moffett," interrupted the detective, who was really beginning to be alarmed by the undue agitation of the affrighted steward. "But, hold on. Wait till I have done with you. Where are the women folk?"

"In their rooms, sir, upstairs."

"Umha! Do you happen to have any photographs of the young ladies handy?"

"There are some in the parlor. Yes, sir."

"Get them for me. Bring them here immediately."

Moffett hastened out, and was back in a moment with the desired articles.

"Umha! And this roguish-looking face is Miss Stella, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"She doesn't resemble her sister much, eh?"

"That has been often remarked, sir."

Mr. Lamm might have said further, if he had deemed it proper, that they were two remarkably pretty girls. There were a brightness and a sparkle about the younger face which betrayed at once the coquettish and laughter-loving spirit of its pos-

sessor. The head of the elder was of a classic mould. There was something of the Medea expression in the regular features. It was a trifle too stern—too unyielding in its outlines. The observer said at once, "That woman has a will of her own."

When Mr. Lamm had made sufficient mental notes upon the pictures, he returned them to the servant, and they were immediately replaced in their customary repositories. This time Mr. Lamm made so bold as to cautiously accompany the butler to the front of the house. The hush of a great calamity reigned everywhere. The house was built on a terrace, and the servants' quarters were on the floor below. That particular story was deserted. At a glance the detective took in the possibilities of the place. All the rooms opened from the wide hallway, separated therefrom by *portières*. This was excellent for his designs, if he could find a suitable hiding-place. His restless eye lighted upon a stained-glass window at the back of the hall.

"What is back of that?" he whispered.

"Toilet room, sir."

"Is that window movable?"

"I believe so, sir; but it is never moved."

"Where does that room open from?"

"From the back hall."

"Very well, Moffett. I will lock myself in there. If there are any inquiries, you have accidentally twisted the key off in the lock, and will go for a

locksmith to repair the damage. The locksmith will not be in. You understand."

Moffett, who was becoming resigned to his fate, though his teeth still exhibited a tendency to chatter, led the way to the room. Standing upon a chair, the detective examined the window. To his delight he found that it could be moved up and down. He took the liberty of making a narrow crevice between the lower sash and the sill. Reassured by the presence of another window opening upon the outer world, Mr. Lamm, who was quite alive to the bold risk he was taking, earnestly impressed upon Mr. Moffett the necessity for secrecy, and locked himself into the room.

The sound of a key turning in the latch-lock of the front door brought about a responsive stir from the story above. There was a rustle of skirts, and a woman, who Lamm imagined had been watching at a window, came down the stairs before the outer door was opened.

"Oh, Mr. Stackhouse!" It was a querulous, tearful woman's voice, and spoke in one of those sibilant whispers that distress the hearer more than would the loudest of tones. "Isn't it awful? My poor brother-in-law! Why haven't they sent the body? It's not come down with you? Oh, dear me, dear me, it seems as though I would go out of my head! Why, Thornton, Thornton, you don't know half what I've been through!"

Mr. Stackhouse placed his hat and coat on a chair.

"You don't know what I've been through," he said, in meaning tones. "Why is the house shut up like this? On such a night the windows at least should be open. Marion and Stella are upstairs together, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes. But, oh, you don't know how I worried about them both. And then the dreadful news of poor Paul's death came on top of my trouble about them. It's a mercy I'm not crazy at this moment."

"What have Marion and Stella been about, eh?" asked Stackhouse sharply.

"Oh, Thornton, they went away yesterday, one after another, without saying a word. I never knew them to go to the city alone that way before. And, oh, Thornton, they didn't come back till the late train. I sat up for them with the creeps all over me the whole evening. And such strange actions when they did come! Stella went up to her room crying. Marion wouldn't say a word to explain, and went upstairs looking—oh! so white!"

"Well, well," returned Stackhouse impatiently. "It's of no particular consequence. We have other things to occupy our time now."

"Yes, indeed, Thornton," said Aunt Comfort, with a sob. She was a portly woman, but exceedingly nervous and fidgety in spite of her size, and she made half a hundred purposeless movements in a moment when excited. "Oh, the body! Where is it? You must go straight back to Boston and

get it. Those body snatchers are terribly sly creatures. Thornton, did you read in yesterday's paper—"

Mr. Stackhouse could endure no more.

"Nonsense, woman!" he interrupted sternly. "Leave this matter to me and attend to your household duties. But tell me," he added immediately, in a voice which he vainly endeavored to render indifferent, "what sent the girls off to the city yesterday afternoon? Did you observe nothing? What did they say?"

"Oh, Thornton! Hush! They are coming."

True enough, there was a sound of a door closing, the rustle of skirts, and the echo of voices simultaneously floating down the staircase from the region above.

Stackhouse took a step forward, but started back immediately, looking upward in a puzzled, apprehensive way.

"Oh, don't! don't! don't! I beg of you, Marion. On my knees I beg of you!"

A woman's voice raised in that keen, penetrating fashion that reveals a climax, an outburst of repressed emotion, uttering such words as these, could not be a common sound in such a house as this. Stackhouse, whose face was in direct line of the detective's vision, looked as if a bombshell had burst at his feet. He was speechless with wonder and dismay.

"Stella," returned an inflexible voice, "I com-

mand you to let me go. I know what my duty is, and I shall do it."

The other woman might have been silenced by fear or overawed by the sternness of her to whom she had appealed, for she made no further outcry. The footsteps were already on the stairs; a white skirt fluttered by the railing. Again Stackhouse took a step forward, and again he stopped. It may have been a gesture on his wife's part or something that he saw in her face. Certain it is that he became a shade whiter, and that in his effort to speak his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. He stammered two words:

"Why, Marion!"

"Don't speak to me! Don't touch me! Never call me by that name again!"

The tone was certainly not a loud one. It could not be said that there was a theatrical ring about the manner of enunciation. The words were low, distinct, and uttered with such calm, terrible intensity that, *blasè* as he was, Detective Lamm experienced a genuine thrill. He felt himself in the presence of a remarkable woman, and the same sort of keen and breathless interest with which he had followed great acting on the stage took possession of him.

"Oh, Marion!" It was the sister who spoke, and the tone was quite heart-broken and hopeless.

Stackhouse seemed to recover from his temporary paralysis.

"You had better go to your room, Stella," he

said, in a voice but barely audible. "I must talk with Marion alone."

"Do not stir a step!" commanded the other woman, as Stella went towards the door. "I wish you to hear what little I have to say to this man. You, too, Aunt Comfort. Don't stand in the doorway there, looking so frightened. Come back. The more witnesses the better."

The defiant, reckless voice that spoke was that of a determined woman who had settled her mind to a purpose and who would follow it unswervingly if it brought her to her death.

There was a brief interval, marked only by Stella's sobbing, and the elder woman's wheezy ejaculations, uttered like signal guns almost every second.

"Marion Stackhouse, have you taken leave of your senses?" faltered the business associate of the late Paul North.

"No, I have just found them. Do not dare to associate your name with mine. This is the last time I will ever speak to you. Witness, Stella, and you, too, Aunt Comfort. From this hour we live apart."

"But Marion," interrupted the woman, "remember your promise at the altar! You are not feeling well, and don't know what you are saying. On this day, too, of all others, when your poor father—"

"Stop, Aunt Comfort!" interposed Marion, imperiously. "You do not know—how is it possible

you should know—the terrible cause that impels me. My contempt for this man whom I have called husband—"

"What fiend possesses you?" interrupted Stackhouse, unable to restrain himself. "Called your husband? What do you mean?"

"A name is all I need to speak," responded Marion, scorn and contempt expressed in every word: "Marie Moissot!"

The name burst from Marion's lips like the accusation of an avenging angel. It is probable that Stackhouse staggered under the force of the blow. Mr. Lamm, who, without an instant's delay, turned his attention to putting that queer-sounding name upon paper ("Marie Moyso" he wrote it), did not see him again for a brief space; and in that time he may have slightly recovered from the first violence of his betrayed emotions. He was still agitated enough in all conscience. This man Thornton Stackhouse, whom Lamm well knew to be in his ordinary walk of life no more self-betraying than the polished surface of a mirror, had been so affected and overwhelmed by what his wife had said to him that he was weaker than a child. He tried to shake off his growing terrors. He endeavored to smile, to laugh, to pass over the affair as a joke, but the effort was a ghastly failure.

"Marion!" he murmured. "Marion! Who has told you? What scoundrel has maligned me to my own wife?"

"Silence, sir! I am not your wife. This was

my father's house. Either you or I must leave it. Which? Choose this minute."

"Marion! Calm yourself, I beseech you? Think of the effect, the occasion, the time. Who knows what people would say?"

"I do not care, sir. If you do, you should have thought of it before. It is too late now."

He turned his white face towards her. Lamm marked plainly in the ample light how his lips trembled, how his eyes gleamed.

"Marion," he said in a fierce undertone, "are you enough mistress of yourself to think what my leaving this house at such a time will mean to the gossips? Can you not see that even I might be accused of complicity in your father's death?"

"And who should be, if you are not?" the woman retorted, in a vibrant tone that pierced the detective's ears like a thunderbolt. There were simultaneous cries from her three visible auditors. The detective swallowed his emotion with a painful effort. He had participated in many an unexpected and stirring scene in his time, but a domestic drama of this nature in a house like this, with actors such as these, filled him with the liveliest amazement. Of all things he had expected or hoped for, this was certainly the last, the most impossible.

For several seconds after his wife had delivered herself of this terrible taunt, Thornton Stackhouse seemed vainly endeavoring to articulate. Then with a sudden movement he seized his hat and turned to the door. The voice which now came to

him was so unlike his natural tones that Lamm would not have recognized it had the speaker been out of view.

"So be it!" he said. "Nobody will ever know what this is to me or how I have loved you, Marion. But so be it. If my own wife turns from me, who will have mercy on me?"

The door opened and closed violently behind the partner of the late Paul North.

Did he speak for effect or were the emotions that inspired his words genuine? It is certain that the amazed detective became strongly prejudiced in his favor.

There was an interval of silence, and then a flutter of skirts and a white, white face appeared at the foot of the stairs. Lamm knew at once that that proud, imperious countenance, the scornful red mouth, the flashing blue eyes, belonged to Marion Stackhouse. But, great powers! could that be her natural expression? And then he saw what was the matter. She reeled, caught at the railing, threw up her arms, and fell like a log to the floor.

So indeed this stoical woman was made of flesh and blood!

CHAPTER V.

AND WHO IS THE AFORESAID MARIE?

DETECTIVE JOHN LAMM, whose experience had rendered his views of life rather more broad than the prosy theorist who judges the world from his commonplace associates, was not unaware of the existence of the emotional drama in real life. Too often had it been his melancholy duty to draw aside the conventional curtain with which the member of modern society endeavors to conceal his serious affairs from the eyes of his neighbor, and to catch a fleeting glimpse of the contending passions which were seething about the presumably quiet hearthstone.

The scene which he had just witnessed did not therefore seem incredible in itself, but the time and circumstances at and in which it had occurred rendered it, in John Lamm's estimation, of a most peculiar and astounding nature. As yet his ideas were too disorderly and confused to enable him to draw logical deductions. The moment had not yet come for theories and explanations. He could only stand still with bated breath and rapid pulse and await the outcome of the strange situation.

When Marion fainted, Stella, pale and trembling,

and looking very unlike her smiling and roguish self, as the photograph had proclaimed her, ran down to her assistance, and while Aunt Comfort was ambling aimlessly, wringing her fat hands and reflecting audibly that she couldn't see why on earth she wasn't already crazy, she was making repeated and intelligent efforts at restoration. The sprinkling of water, which Stella procured without summoning the servants, eventually having the effect of causing the eyelids, upon which some of the drops fell, to unclose, Marion murmured some incoherent words, arose, and with her sister's help, staggered to a chair, where she sat for several minutes as motionless and as speechless as if she had been in a trance. Aunt Comfort, suddenly awakening to her responsibilities, ran to fan her with a book cover, murmuring continuously soothing and reassuring expressions.

Marion did not appear to notice her, though the detective saw the girl's eyes more than once following her sister's motions in a relentless, questioning way. Mr. Lamm hoped for some conversation which would throw light on the dramatic charade that had been enacted in his presence, but he was disappointed. Nothing came but the uninterrupted monologue of wheezy Aunt Comfort. Neither of the sisters spoke other than in monosyllables, until Marion, suddenly flushing under some words of the elderly lady solicitous for Thornton Stackhouse, said imperiously :

"Stop ! stop ! I tell you ! Not another word.

This house was not his. It was my father's. Whatever there may be in it which belongs to him must be sent to him. If he ever comes here again I shall go away. If he has given any orders concerning my father's funeral they must be countermanded. It would be a sacrilege which I could not permit."

Aunt Comfort seemed to be too much alarmed to make any reply or to put any inquiry, and whatever remonstrance Stella had to offer against her sister's extraordinary conduct must have been uttered before the arrival of Stackhouse, for it was evident that she had become hopelessly resigned to the situation.

A ring at the door bell fell with startling effect upon the silence of the house. Stella fled precipitately to the upper regions, while Aunt Comfort, with her hand on her heart, stared apprehensively at the door. It was Marion herself who waved back the advancing servant with an imperious gesture and went resolutely to answer the summons.

"Bless me!" Mr. Lamm exclaimed within himself. "It's my risky client!"

And behold on the threshold, hat in hand, a bit flushed and embarrassed, and with an expression of lively solicitude as befitted the occasion, Mr. Richard Fetridge!

"You come at a sad time, sir," murmured Aunt Comfort, walking aimlessly between the door and the staircase.

"I am very glad you are here, Mr. Fetridge," Marion said, in collected tones. "If we ever needed a friend, it is at this moment."

"I need not say with what eagerness I shall avail myself of any opportunity to aid you, Mrs. Stackhouse," he said earnestly.

She looked him directly in the eyes.

"Not Mrs. Stackhouse, Marion North."

He made a painful effort to appear unembarrassed, but it was quite evident that he was gravely alarmed.

"You—you—know—" he stammered.

"Everything," she returned, with a forlorn, bitter accent.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated, in ill-concealed alarm. "Who told you?"

She made no reply in words, but with a simple gesture indicated the *portière* at the right. In a moment the two people had disappeared from view, leaving Aunt Comfort staring like a petrified figure in a museum at the drawn curtain. She was awakened from her lethargy by the voice of Stella calling piteously from above.

"Oh! Aunt Comfort! Do come here! Do come here!"

And as the only remaining personage in the field of his vision disappeared, John Lamm, detective, began to exhibit sundry signs of exasperation. In vain he strained his listening ears, in vain he ventured to raise the sash of the window to an imprudent degree. Nothing but the vague murmur of

voices and the occasional distant sound of sobbing rewarded his efforts.

"To be cut off at such a point as this!" he fumed. "I'd enjoy hanging the architect who put such a stupid building together!"

There was nothing for him to do but to conjecture and wait. The two people remained in the parlor for nearly half an hour. At the expiration of that time the impatient watcher saw the *portière* disturbed and they reappeared in the hall. Mr. Lamm eagerly marked their respective appearances, hoping thereby to construct some theory of the nature of their interview. Marion was very pale, cold, determined, collected. Fetridge bore traces of unwonted agitation. His face was flushed; his hand unsteady.

She accompanied him to the door. He had opened it, when he turned impulsively and said, appealingly:

"Marion, wont you reconsider your unhappy resolution and make a confidant of me?"

"Richard Fetridge, you ought to understand me well enough by this time to know that I never go any other way than straight ahead. I do not act on impulse, but from determination."

He seemed abashed for some reason. His eyes were turned towards the floor at her feet.

"It was only for your good," he murmured. "And I shall still continue to do everything in my power to make the terrible blow easier for you."

He bowed constrainedly, glanced furtively up the

staircase as if he hoped to see another face, and went out. The door closed.

Marion caught her breath, set her teeth together, clinched her fists, and stood motionless looking at the carpet.

"I'd give five hundred dollars to know what that girl is thinking of," thought the detective; "she can assume the most unpleasant expression for a handsome woman I ever saw. And, hang me, if I shouldn't dislike to be in a position dependent on her and incur her enmity. She would sting like a serpent the man who attempted to throttle her."

The fair woman with the Medea face did not remain long the subject of his critical contemplation. Slowly, and in the same thoughtful attitude, she began with firm step to ascend the staircase, and soon vanished from John Lamm's sight and hearing.

That gentleman rapidly came to the conclusion that there was nothing further to be gained by longer remaining in his precarious hiding-place. Carefully closing the window, he turned the key in the lock, and was preparing to leave by way of the door, when he stopped suddenly under the spell of a new idea. He remained inactive just long enough to consider the feasibility of the proposition. It was a bold step to take, but bold steps, to the verge of recklessness sometimes, were those by which he had achieved his present eminence in his profession. In two minutes his mind was made up. Instead of leaving by the door, he first made sure that the

coast was clear, and then got out of the window, and walked rapidly around the corner to the front entrance.

He pulled authoritatively at the bell. After a short delay the summons was answered by the still tremulous Moffett.

"I am sorry, man," said Mr. Lamm, "but I must see the ladies after all. Give my card to Miss Harwood, please."

Moffett accepted the proffered piece of pasteboard, on which was engraved :

LEVI DILLINGHAM.

Police Detective.

Aunt Comfort responded, breathless and asthmatic. She invited John Lamm into the reception-room. With quiet dignity the detective proceeded to apologize and to reassure her. He regretted the necessity which forced him to call at such a time, and enlarged upon the great service she might do the cause of justice by making him acquainted with whatsoever facts of any possible bearing on the motive for the murder that might be in her possession. It was useless. At another time the amiable housekeeper might have filled his note-book with unconscious revelations ; but there is a point beyond which garrulousness becomes complete idiocy, and it is little exaggeration to say that the terrible events of the day had carried

Aunt Comfort over the limit. There was absolutely nothing to be got from her but tears and gasps and interjections. The idea of calling upon Mrs. Stackhouse to present the case was an inspiration to her and a relief to the patient Lamm.

It is true that he awaited the coming of Marion with some compunctions and no little curiosity. The young lady entered the room haughtily, and looked at him in a distant, unemotional way.

"Did you desire my presence, sir?"

"If you please, madam," said John Lamm; "and also that of your sister, if it be possible."

"My sister," she returned quickly, "is altogether too young to be of any use to you in such an emergency. Nor do I choose to have her disturbed at such a time."

"I bow to your superior judgment, madam. You understand that I am a simple officer of the law with the single purpose of doing my duty. I wish to do it with as little anoyance to the family as possible."

"What do you wish, sir? I do not see how anybody in this house can aid you. We know nothing of this crime but the awful fact, and it does seem that at such a time the police might do their duty without intruding into the circle of the bereaved family."

"Pardon me," said Lamm, humbly but respectfully, as he stood before her, turning his hat in his uneasy hands. "The affair is a mystery. We desire to arrest the guilty parties. Often the rela-

tives in such cases have strong reasons for suspicions."

"We have none," returned Marion decisively.

"No, indeed!" corroborated Aunt Comfort. "The idea of such a thing!"

"You are utterly unaware of any possible motive for this crime?"

Intentionally Detective Lamm cast a keen, searching glance full into the face of the stoical young woman. His idea was to intimidate rather than to observe her, for he had a furtive way of scrutinizing people without appearing to do so. It was ineffective. Not even her eyelashes quivered.

"Utterly," she said firmly. "And now, sir, are you satisfied?"

"Unfortunately, no," said Lamm, glancing uneasily at Aunt Comfort. "Could I—would it be presumptuous in me—to ask for a private interview?"

Marion drew a full breath. There was a slight quiver as she did so, which seemed to indicate that her calmness was the result of rigid expressions of her spontaneous emotions. She motioned Aunt Comfort towards the hall.

"Well, sir?" she said as soon as they were alone. John Lamm saw that she had no intention of prolonging the interview. He resolved to break the ice of her reserve with one fell crush.

"Tell me," he said, without preface, "who is Marie Moyso?"

She could not repress the start nor the tell-tale

blush that rose into her cheeks. But she made a brave effort which aroused John Lamm's unspoken admiration.

"Why do you ask?" Only this in a faint voice, as a response to this unexpected bombshell.

"What grit that girl has!" was John Lamm's unuttered comment. Her question, however, warned him that he was on the brink of a precipice, the other side of which he could not see. Still, with his accustomed audacity, he took the leap in the dark.

"Because," he said boldly, "there is reason to believe that such a woman is mixed up in this affair."

"Ah!" she returned coldly, "I know nothing of her. Really, Mr. Officer, you must excuse me if you have nothing more to say than this. The occasion is too grave—too solemn. You should go to Mr. North's partner, Mr. Stackhouse. He can tell you more about it than anybody else."

Did she mean to give these last words a special emphasis? The detective was not sure, but he saw that it would be more than useless to prolong the interview. He had made up his mind that Marion Stackhouse was impervious to surprise and inaccessible to an ordinary appeal. Before he could hope to penetrate that armor he would be obliged to prepare himself with a host of facts of which he was now ignorant. So he took his leave with the best grace possible, and once more breathed the freer air of the quiet streets. Unquestionably

it was a relief to get out of that house with its mysterious secrets and its unlaid ghosts.

"She is one woman in ten thousand!" he muttered to himself as he walked away. "At her age such self-command is as uncommon as a lottery prize. Well, we'll try again."

Some inquiries assured him that it was not far to the seaside residence of Richard Fetridge. In five minutes after leaving Marion's presence he was bowing before the astonished Fetridge, whom he met on the veranda overlooking the ocean.

"You here?"

"So it would seem, Mr. Fetridge."

"And what can you have discovered so soon?"

"I'll tell you. It is a simple clue and may not lead to much. Still I must beg leave to ask your assistance. I wish to put a question, stipulating that you do not ask me any in return. You see, I am not ready to make a report yet."

Fetridge slightly frowned. Evidently he did not relish mysteries.

"Ask your question, Mr. Lamm."

"Who is Marie Moyso?"

Fetridge sprang up with a force that overturned his chair.

"The deuce!" he ejaculated. "How came you by that name?"

"Ho, ho!" quoth John Lamm in his mind. "This gentleman does not guard his secrets so well as the lady yonder."

"I must remind you, Mr. Fetridge," he returned, quietly, "that you were not to ask questions. Still, I don't mind telling you that the woman seems to be in some way connected with our friend Stackhouse."

"Humph! I shall begin to regard you as a wizard, rather than a detective, Mr. Lamm," Fetridge remarked, with an effort to conceal his astonishment. "I must say I cannot conceive by what possibility you become possessed of that name. But since you have, I must remind you that you are working for me, and that whatever information you obtain ends with me. Nobody beyond us is to know a syllable. You understand that?"

"I should be wholly ignorant of my business if I did not."

"Very well. But about this Moissot woman—"

"And, by the way, how do you spell that, Mr. Fetridge?"

Fetridge spelled the name and Mr. Lamm wrote it down, smiling at his own mistake.

"French?"

"It's a Creole name, I believe."

"Oh, to be sure. And have you any idea of her whereabouts at this time?"

"She was in New York five years ago. I cannot say—though Mr. Stackhouse, who may find it convenient to keep track of her, perhaps can—what has become of her."

The two men looked at each other.

"Well," said Fetridge, impatiently, "why do you

ask me this? What possible connection can she have with this case?"

Not caring to betray himself by answering this question, John Lamm deemed it prudent to withdraw.

"I have barely time to catch the train back," he exclaimed, hurriedly glancing at his watch in the fading light. "I'll talk with you later, Mr. Fetridge."

And he was off at once at an energetic pace. But he did not leave Swampscott till he had made Mr. Moffett his firm friend.

John Lamm was not one of the sort to let grass grow under his feet or to neglect any clue, however unlikely, which could possibly bring him to success in an important quest.

When at last, after a long conference with the "inside man" of the late Paul North, he was in the train on his way back to the city, he began writing an advertisement to be forwarded to a correspondent in New York for insertion in the daily papers there.

"MARIE MOISSOT!—Any information as to whereabouts of Marie Moissot will be liberally rewarded by the undersigned. The lady herself will learn something to her advantage by addressing——, ——."

"It's a slim chance," muttered the detective, "but still it may lead to something."

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE AFTER DEATH.

AT eight o'clock in the evening of this same Friday, medical examiner Jarrett sat at his desk in the office at his house busily writing.

"Upon making a careful and complete examination of the body of the man named Paul North, I find that a ball, probably fired from a revolver of 32 calibre, at an angle of probably 20 degrees, and from a distance not exceeding three feet, entered his back near the spinal column at the seventh intercostal space on the right side, and passed in an inward and upward direction, going through the upper portion of the liver and completely through the lower lobe of the right lung.

"The path of the ball was not arrested, showing that it was fired in the direction indicated. It pierced the lung nearly opposite the third rib and left the body on the front side, just above the rib named.

"I do not find that the said Paul North could have committed suicide. The position of the entrance of the ball, and its direction, seemed to deny this possibility.

"There was ample external hæmorrhage to have

permitted the man to have written the words on the wall of the room in which he was found. If so, immediately the writing was concluded, he no doubt died.

"Death was painless, and resulted from internal hæmorrhage, caused by the opening of an artery in the right lung."

The ringing of the office bell suspended the report of the autopsy over Paul North's body at this point.

Dr. Jarrett rose to meet his caller, recognizing him at once as the reporter whom he had met a few hours previously at the house in Marlboro Street.

"Ah, Thomas," he said, "still on the case, eh? A very good story, that of yours in the afternoon paper—very judicious indeed."

"Thanks," the reporter answered. "And now I want you to help me get out an equally good story, or a better one, for the morning. The autopsy was performed at the City Hospital morgue, of course. Can't you give me the report?"

Dr. Jarrett shook his head and rubbed his chin.

"There isn't a man I would sooner give out the report to than you, Thomas, but it wouldn't do to have it published before it's submitted. All I can say at this point really is that I have no doubt whatever that murder has been committed."

Mr. Thomas fingered his watch chain.

"Not a word more?" he queried.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Thomas," the medical examiner answered, after a meditative turn up and down the hall. "You have kept a good many im-

portant secrets when the work of the authorities couldn't have been done without your silence. I'll tell you who assisted in the autopsy. You could interview him without mentioning my name in the matter."

A broad smile illumined the reporter's face, and he presented the medical examiner with a very comprehensive wink.

"Dr. Francis Huntress is the man," continued the examiner, confidentially. "He has an office where he lives, at No. — Greenwich Park."

"I know him well," said Mr. Thomas, as he parted from the doctor; and there was full justification for the words in the friendly greeting accorded to him at the surgeon's door.

Two minutes after he had pulled at the bell handle, Thomas was comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair in the doctor's study, the physician sitting opposite to him at his desk, where a drop light burned.

"You are the most extraordinary fellow," the surgeon exclaimed, admiringly, after Thomas had stated his mission. "Some of the morgue people must have told you I was called in. No? Well, never mind—we'll assume you divined it, as you have a hundred other matters supposed to be the most profound of secrets. But I'll tell you one one thing, my black-haired friend. This is one of the most curious and remarkable cases that ever came to my attention!"

"You have no doubt it was a case of murder?"

questioned Mr. Thomas, busy with his watch charm.

"I can find no other explanation. You saw the wound; you noticed how the man lay? Now the bullet was a 32-calibre pistol ball. It entered at an angle of certainly no less than twenty degrees, and went upwards and inwards in that direction. I don't know whether you observed any traces of powder on the man's clothing?"

"No."

"They were there, nevertheless. And that means that the pistol from which the fatal shot was fired couldn't have been held more than three feet away. At the same time we concluded it must have been more than two. And this, you see, effectually disposes of the theory of suicide."

"An angle of twenty degrees, you say, doctor?"

"About that—not exactly."

"Then the pistol was fired behind the man's back; and was held at what height from the floor?"

"Very easily reckoned. About two and a half feet from the floor."

"That's curious," said Thomas, with a puzzled air; "but the angle of twenty degrees explains what I couldn't understand. And that is why the bullet should have entered the wall at a height of ten feet from the floor."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the surgeon, greatly interested; "well, now, if you've got the lateral angle of that bullet, since we already have the upward

angle of it, it is a simple mathematical problem to decide just where Paul North stood when the shot was fired."

Thomas drew a roll of paper from his pocket. Separating from a curled-up photographer's proof the proof of a compositor, he spread it out upon the surgeon's desk. It was his diagram of the second floor of the house in Marlboro Street.

"There, doctor," he said, pointing with his pencil to the center of the space between the two doors at the back of the library; "that is about the point where the bullet entered. The cartridge end of the ball was intact, and protruded from the wall, pointing like the end of a finger backwards and downwards in a direction that would bring us very near the writing desk in the corner by the bay-window."

"How far distant?"

"I should say about fifteen feet."

The surgeon made a brief mathematical calculation.

"Roughly speaking," he said, "there is a rise of about six inches to a foot in an angle of twenty degrees. Starting with a point two and a half feet from the floor the remaining seven feet and a half necessary to attain the height of ten feet would be gained in a horizontal measurement of just about fifteen feet."

"Capital!" exclaimed Thomas, who saw the force of this at once. "It follows inevitably that the murderer must have fired from a point near the

writing-desk, and that North stood three or four feet this side of the desk, facing the wall."

"Or better still, facing the door near where he was found."

"Just as if," said the reporter, "somebody there had called to him or startled him so that he turned away from his assailant for the moment."

"And the murderer had been sitting before the writing-desk. Exactly."

Thomas shook his head dubiously.

"All this sounds very well, doctor," he said; "but it's too mathematical to be true. Things don't happen that way. The bullet may have been deflected in its course."

"I don't see how it could have been."

"Oh, gracious! don't attempt to account for the conduct of bullets," said Thomas; "the police departments are full of the most curious records of their freaks. Sometimes the most deadly ball will fail to do its work—especially if held too near the victim. One man, it is said, attempted to commit suicide by holding the pistol muzzle against his forehead. If he had held it a little way off it would have blown his brains out. As it was, the bullet flattened itself and slid off harmlessly. And as an instance of the power of a spent ball, I may cite the case of that East Boston woman a short time ago, who was killed while frying doughnuts at her kitchen stove, by a bullet fired by a guard on duty at the Navy Yard a mile away. To enter the house the bullet bored its way through the whole

thickness of the window-sash and went clean through her besides."

"So you would consider it nothing astonishing that the bullet in this case, after passing completely through North's body, should still have the strength to bury itself in the wall."

"No," said Thomas; "though I should say unhesitatingly that it was no toy pistol. And now, doctor, I want to ask you two or three questions. In the first place, isn't it within the possibilities of medical science to determine just how long a man has been dead?"

"Anywhere within twenty-four or thirty-six hours, probably yes."

"With how much accuracy?"

"Well, possibly within an hour."

"As close as that?"

"I believe that most surgeons and physicians accept the proposition of an eminent surgeon and chemist who stated a few years ago that the day will come when we may first determine the general health of the subject by examination of the other organs, and then submit the clotted blood in the heart to microscopic tests. The blood, you know, is made up of three parts—the serum, and the red and white corpuscles. The red corpuscles contain the life. That life remains for several days after death if the body is without disease to induce over-rapid decomposition. The length of time which has elapsed since the heart ceased to beat may be determined by the amount of life in the red cor-

puscles. The same test is also applied to the contents of the other vessels."

"Have those tests been applied in this case, doctor?"

"Yes; but merely as an experiment to compare with the other tests applied. I am happy to say they showed, in a measure, the probable reliability of the theory."

"And what were those other tests?"

"Most bodies become quite cold in from eight to twelve hours after death. In the cases of bodies which present certain signs that I need not detail, we know that death has not been present more than twelve hours. In from twelve to eighteen hours, however, the eyeballs become soft and inelastic and feel flaccid. The last sign of the earliest stage of death is the *rigor mortis*. This is, perhaps, the most dependable of the signs we have to guide us at present. Of course, the rigidity of the body may continue beyond a week, but the circumstances which would occasion this would be too extraordinary to be unnoticed. Considering all these things, I should repeat that the length of time which Mr. North has been dead is tolerably certain."

"And from this, when did you determine that Mr. North had died?"

"Perhaps Dr. Jarrett would object to my giving that information to the press," said the surgeon, hesitatingly.

"Then don't give it to the press. Give it to me."

Thomas smiled insinuatingly.

"And you—what will you do with it?"

"Compare it with such other information as I already possess, to see if my suspicions are correct."

"You suspect somebody."

"Everybody."

The surgeon laughed, and Thomas laughed with him. There was a quiet air of unassuming ability and a strength of character about the newspaper man which asserted itself to everybody of sufficient discernment to appreciate such a fact before he had been in their presence five minutes. The surgeon, moreover, knew him to be a man of his word.

"Then I understand that this communication is confidential?" he asked.

"Decidedly, for the present."

"In that case, I don't mind telling you that we came to the conclusion that Mr. North was shot between eight and nine o'clock last night."

The reporter repeated the sentence word for word to be sure there was no mistake, and rolled the pendant to his watch chain rapidly between his fingers.

"What is it?" asked the surgeon, whose attention was directed towards the glistening white trifle.

"That?" said the reporter, glancing down and up again with a quaint smile. "That's a souvenir of a case I worked on once. It was a woman's tooth, I suspect, at one time. It was a sort of a clue which I followed to success, while the rest— But

it don't matter. It's an interesting story, so I wont get started on it. I'm not so sure the North case wont equal it. Of course, you know about that strange writing on the wall?"

"Yes," was the answer; "Dr. Jarrett said there was no doubt that a name was scrawled there, and that the writing was in blood."

"Do you think Mr. North could have written it himself?"

"Well, that's a leading question," answered the surgeon, as he leaned back in his chair. "I did not see the writing."

"No?" said Thomas. He unrolled the photographer's proof. "Well, there it is—natural size, just as it looks."

The surgeon scrutinized the scrawl with great interest.

"Well, this is most extraordinary," he said. "Why, you can plainly mark how many times he was obliged to dip his finger by the corresponding heaviness of outline. Observe the S, the a, the h, and finally the letter following the u, where his strength seems suddenly to have deserted him and the finger dragged downwards. That makes four times."

"Yes, if he wrote it," said Thomas. "But how about that, doctor?"

"There is, at least, no conclusive reason why he might not have written it himself. It was certainly done with his forefinger. A careful examination of the end of that finger convinces me that it had not

only been dipped in blood, but thereafter drawn over a surface while wet. The difference in the degree of the stain at different parts of the finger indicates that. How far above the floor is this writing?"

"Just about a foot and a half. It is a tinted wall, and the writing is immediately above the footboard."

In his interest the surgeon actually left his chair and got down upon his side by his study wall, and, raising himself slightly on his right elbow, began to trace with the forefinger of his right hand.

"Just the right height," he said. "Was the writing horizontal? Did it run just parallel with the footboard?"

"Just about."

"If a man had directed this writing from a higher point, Thomas, he would have written back handed. How was the slope of the letters?"

"Natural."

"And have you seen any specimens of North's handwriting? Does he form his letters that way?"

"Yes; as nearly as could be expected under the circumstances."

"Then I should say," said the surgeon, rising, "that it is more than probable that North wrote it."

"But with a wound like that," suggested the reporter, "death must have been instantaneous."

"Ah, there you have failed to distinguish between speedy death and instantaneous death. What is commonly called instantaneous death—from a shot

in the heart, for instance—is by no means such. A second is an hour to a dying man. On the other hand, the severing of the spinal column by a bullet would actually cut a thought in two. Man goes into the presence of his Maker under such circumstances without an instant to prepare himself. But in a case like North's, we must take into consideration the power of the human will to prolong life."

"To defer the moment of death?" asked the reporter, incredulously.

"Certainly. A man shot through the heart often has time to cry out a sentence. The incredible swiftness of thought in the hour of mortal peril has been attested by the mouths of hundreds of witnesses. Rescued from impending death by some providential good fortune, they have declared that they lived over the events of a lifetime in a few seconds."

"But this writing on the wall was not an act of memory."

"No. But with thought in a man of strong purpose would come quick determination and the power to act, even at that moment. You must bear in mind that Mr. North's death was caused by the filling of his lungs with blood instead of air. It was a painless death, and Mr. North's will power would have enabled him to prolong his life sixty seconds—perhaps even 180 seconds—ample time for the writing of this name on the wall, as you can see. Take the name Paul North; trace it slowly,

as if you had to dip your finger in the writing fluid four times. There. Now time yourself. How long did it take you?"

"Just twenty seconds," said Mr. Thomas.

"Exactly. Now you understand the possibilities in this matter of the writing; and I tell you, Thomas, this talk with you only confirms and emphasizes my belief that here you have a great case—one of the most extraordinary in my experience. If you can put what I've told you to good use, I shall be glad; but mind, I shall not look to see it in the morning papers."

The surgeon had arisen and was accompanying the reporter to the door. Thomas stopped him by a restraining gesture.

"By the way, doctor, stand just as you are. Now will you put your finger on that part of your body corresponding to that where Paul North was shot?"

The surgeon obliged him. Thomas, standing behind him, made several rapid measurements and calculations with his eye and hand.

"There is something decidedly curious here, doctor," he said. "Stand behind me, please. Suppose me your intended victim, if it's not too great a strain on your imagination. Now see where you must hold your pistol to comply with all conditions —within three feet, pointed upward at an angle of twenty degrees!"

The surgeon, who hastened to attempt the experiment, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Curious how much a man may miss when he

thinks he has observed the whole, sometimes," he said. "Why, I never thought of this before."

"What, doctor?"

"The man who fired that ball must have been upon his knees."

"Precisely! Precisely!" exclaimed Thomas. "Just my thoughts exactly. What sane person would fire a pistol at a man in any such direction in an erect attitude? It would be almost equally absurd if the assassin had been seated."

"You are right," returned the surgeon, thoughtfully. "He might have been crouching behind some article of furniture—"

"Or been previously knocked down!" Thomas interposed, turning a very meaning look upon the surgeon's face.

"So, indeed! That would indicate, then, a struggle to your mind!"

"It would indicate that the murderer fired in self-defense, or from momentary passion induced by North's treatment of him."

"Good! Good!" cried the surgeon. "There's a theory that presents all the plausibility of life. These cold-blooded, deliberate murders are going out of fashion in this age of the world. And thereupon the horrified murderer flees and the dying man writes his name upon the wall by which he lies."

Thomas shook hands warmly with the speaker. He did not say so, but the surgeon understood the action to indicate that the reporter was con-

gratulating him upon having arrived at the same conclusions to which he himself had come.

When Thomas found himself in the cool air of the June night again, he hastened at a round pace in the direction of Newspaper Row. He was near the door of his own office when a man jumped from a horse car and tapped him upon the shoulder. It was Detective John Lamm, direct from Swampscott.

"What's your hurry, Kingman?" he inquired, with the easy assurance of a familiar acquaintance. "Come up into my office a few minutes. I want to talk with you."

Reporter Thomas consulted his watch.

"The fact is, old man," he said with a frank smile, "I'm rather driven to-night. It's that North mystery, you understand."

"How do you know that isn't the very matter I wanted to talk with you about?" returned Mr. Lamm, taking the reporter's arm with good-humored insistence, and escorting him, half reluctantly, to his own private den, as he called it.

"Kingman, I know you, and you know me," said the detective, after they were fairly settled in their chairs. "It came to me when I saw you just now that we might work this case together. It wouldn't be the first case we have handled together, eh?"

"You're right," said Thomas.

"Now, I'm interested in this North mystery very particularly, you understand," pursued Mr. Lamm, quite warming to his subject, now that he was

closeted with a tried friend, and at an hour when he was reasonably secure from interruption. "Not for the Government, of course. Private parties. And my opinion, gathered from all I have been able to ascertain about the case, is that it is very mysterious, very complicated, and may baffle even the most thorough investigation."

Thomas pursed up his lips, and regarded the gas jet doubtfully.

"You don't think so, eh?"

"When I hear what Thornton Stackhouse's *alibi* is, I can answer you better."

"*Alibi*, eh? So you have the medical examiner's report? Good! Just what I was after. When did North die?"

The reporter laughingly parried this query with another.

"Do you suppose I have the doctor's report on the autopsy in my coat pocket?"

Mr. Lamm ventured to express a shrewd suspicion that his friend did possess, by some fortunate chance or other, the essential facts of that report, and Mr. Thomas quite justified that suspicion by letting him know, in strict confidence, the outcome of his interview with the surgeon.

The detective uttered a long, low whistle.

"Curious! Mighty curious!" he commented.

"If you'll be so good as to give me an opportunity," suggested Thomas, "I'll be pleased to ejaculate with you."

"Um—ha! You said a moment ago, Thomas,

that your opinion of the case would depend upon the *alibi* of Thornton Stackhouse. What would you say if I told you that the said gentleman's elsewhere has one weak spot in it, involving the precise period of time that you have mentioned?"

"I should say nothing, but remain in hourly expectation of Thornton Stackhouse's arrest."

"Very well. See that you do say nothing, for the secret is yours and mine at present. And so you have already convicted the poor fellow?"

John Lamm took one of the cigars which stood upright in the upper pocket of his vest, and drew a match against the under side of his chair, which was tipped back against the wall.

"I must confess," Thomas replied, "that it looks to me something that way."

"Oh, indeed, yes. The evidence is strong—even stronger, probably, than you know—against him. But then—"

In lieu of continuing, Lamm lighted his cigar.

"Thomas, what is your definition of a good theory of a mystery?" he suddenly inquired, as he threw the match from him.

"I don't know that I ever thought of defining it."

"Well, I'll tell you what mine is. A good theory is one which thoroughly explains all the facts in the case."

"Short and comprehensive," said Thomas.

"I subscribe to it. That's my idea. Now, is

there any fact in the case, so far known, inconsistent with Thornton Stackhouse being the man?"

"None at all."

"Ah! And yet I can see plainly enough that you don't subscribe to my opinion. Is there any fact which the supposition of his guilt leaves unexplained?"

"There is one fact which the supposition of his guilt does not explain."

"Well, now we are coming to the point. What is it?"

"It doesn't explain to my mind why a certain individual of my acquaintance should be so anxious to convict him."

"Name the man."

"It would be a breach of professional etiquette. But as you and I are old friends, Thomas, and never betray each other's confidences, I don't mind saying to you that, if you can get hold of any facts tending to explain Mr. Richard Fetridge's strong interest in this case, I shall be exceedingly obliged if you will bring them to me."

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Thomas, opening his eyes; "there is more in this case, then, than I thought!"

And when he left the room after a half-hour's further conversation, it was with the conviction that, unless some unexpected thing happened to determine otherwise, the North mystery would turn out to be a complication worthy of his best thought and his most skillful treatment.

As for Detective John Lamm, he remained for fully an hour after Thomas had left him, motionless and silent in a cloud of smoke. He was quite aware that his bold stroke of enterprise of the morning had put him a long distance ahead of any other possible investigator in the case. The question was how to turn his discoveries to the best advantage.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INSPECTOR DISCOVERS NEW EVIDENCE.

THE Friday when the body of Paul North was discovered, and the day following, were two exceedingly busy days for the police department, under the active superintendence and guidance of Inspector Applebee.

Not even Aunt Comfort, who had made it her panting duty as housekeeper, to range the Marlboro Street house at frequent intervals, from basement to attic, knew half so much about the place and what it contained as Inspector Applebee.

Again and again he had examined every nook and corner, turning his bullseye upon the recesses of every trunk and box, sounding every cask and receptacle, making sure that nowhere within the four walls of Paul North's home was hidden the weapon which had caused Paul North's death.

It was with rather a puzzled countenance and a mind unsettled and ill at ease that about noon on Saturday he sought a conference with his chief at headquarters; for even Inspector Applebee had his superior officer.

"Well, Applebee!" said the chief inspector, as the door was closed, and the two men found them-

selves alone in the little office ; "are you prepared to make any arrests? What's on your mind? Have you found out anything?"

"Found out anything? I've found out too much. There's just the trouble. When I woke up this morning my mind was settled. Four hour's work and it's all at sea again. Fully prepared to make an arrest to-day, I've now reached a point where I don't know whom to suspect, or what to think."

"Well, take this morning for a starting point. When we separated last night, you were sure the partner was our man."

"I was. In the first place, North seemed to have written his name on the wall in his own blood. Now, it strikes me that an accusation made at the moment of death is a very solemn one. A man isn't likely at such a time to indulge in feelings of petty spite or practical joking, is he, now?"

"I should say not, decidedly. But why were you so sure that he wrote it?"

"Because the doctors say he could have done it, and that there are few circumstances of death like that under which such a thing could happen. And it strikes me that to assume somebody else did it in face of such a report, is taking too much advantage of what must be in that case a remarkable coincidence.

"Coincidences happen," said the chief shortly.

"So they do. But in nine hundred and ninety-nine chances out of a thousand, if a murderer

endeavored to throw us off by such a ruse, the medical examiner would discover the trick at a glance, and denounce the writing as a fraud."

"Even so. How do you know what North had in his mind to write? He might have started in to declare 'Stackhouse is my executor,' or 'Stackhouse inherits my property,' or 'Stackhouse is—' anything else you may please to imagine."

"True," said Applebee doubtfully.

"And then, again we are not unquestionably sure that the writing is intended for Stackhouse, are we?"

"After two hours of inspection and experiment, I am fully persuaded that it cannot be anything else."

"And how does Stackhouse himself impress you?"

"Confound the man! He puzzles me. I had a long talk with him this morning. He carries a 32-calibre pistol. There are no signs of its having been recently discharged."

"I presume he knows how to clean it," said the chief inspector dryly.

"No doubt; and how to fire it, too. But what good does that do us? I put the case to him plainly. I said, 'Stackhouse, this is no time for conventionalities. People are beginning to talk. Better clear it up at once by giving me an *alibi*.' Shoot me, if he didn't say that between eight and nine, when Jarrett says North was shot, he was walking in the Public Garden alone, smoking a cigar."

"Looks bad."

"So it does. But the queerest thing is that he is not living at home. Where did Thornton Stackhouse spend last night? At his house at the beach, where the women folk would certainly be expected to need him at such a time as this, of all times? No, sir. At the Adams House."

"That means trouble in the family."

"And very serious trouble. Men quarrel with their wives often enough; but not often under such circumstances as these."

"How did you find the family?"

"Frightened to death. Stupid. Idiotic. Stackhouse's wife alone preserves her senses, and she is a tartar. She seemed to take my visit as a personal affront, and read me a lecture on propriety. I confess I lost my temper. 'Do you intend to hinder justice all you can, or to help it?' said I. 'It's not in my province to do either,' she said, with a defiant look in her eye. 'I shall let justice take its course.' I can forgive a young woman with plenty of money for doing a great deal, but there's such a thing as overdoing the high and mighty. I couldn't imagine what made her seem so unmoved by her father's death till I learned that she's not his daughter after all."

"No?"

"An adopted child."

"Adopted at what age?"

"Took her out of the Temporary Home in Charles Street when she was a year old."

"Watch that woman."

"You may be sure I shall."

"How about the other daughter?"

"She's his own daughter, but I didn't see her. I was given to understand she was completely prostrated by her father's death. She is between seventeen and eighteen years old, and I doubt if she could help us at all."

"But all this doesn't explain what has unsettled your ideas about Stackhouse. So far you have only confirmed your own suspicions."

"Ah, but there have been several new facts. At an early hour this morning, I deputed two men to make a thorough canvass of the neighborhood for the purpose of ascertaining whether anybody had been seen going in or coming out of the North house on the night of the murder. Unfortunately the people who live directly opposite, who would be more likely to have observed than anybody else, left for Newport yesterday morning. Still, we have found a servant girl, Hannah Doyle, who lives several houses further down. This woman positively declares that when she was returning home after dark about half-past nine on Thursday night, she saw a woman—a young woman, she believes—come down the steps of the North house and walk away."

"The deuce she did! Can she not be mistaken in the house?"

"She says not. What made her notice the woman and remember the circumstance was the peculiar

fact that anybody should be coming out of a house boarded up for the summer. And no other house for several doors except the North house is boarded up."

"This is important, Applebee."

"I think so."

"Half-past nine must have been later than the murder. Consequently the woman must have been the criminal or an accomplice."

"She could not have failed to know that North had been killed even if she had no part in the deed. The fact that she gave no alarm—has not spoken a word since—declares her complicity."

"It seems proof positive."

"Another fact, if you please. I have discovered that North had somewhere in his possession a 32-calibre pistol. That pistol was presumably in the Marlboro Street house on the night of the murder. I have searched the premises from top to bottom without finding a trace of it."

"That has an odd look, too."

"But," continued Applebee, with a meaning emphasis, "I did find the box of cartridges—nearly filled—in a drawer of the writing desk in the library where the man was shot. The drawer was closed, but the box was open."

"Important," said the chief inspector, quickly. "Important. Now, how thorough has been your search of the premises?"

"I did not take any chances. I took two men with me. We even visited the coal bins and exam-

ined the ash barrels in detail. Stackhouse has been eager to afford us any help. He has given us every key we asked for. The search has been thorough. The pistol is not there."

"So then it only remains to discover who that woman was."

"So it seems."

"Have you no clue?"

"Just one."

"Of what nature?"

"A perfume. To be sure, there is a handkerchief, but it is unmarked, and I have inquired at the stores where they sell such things, to no purpose. I told you where and when I found that bit of lace. It was upon the stairs, between the second and third floors, not a great many steps from the door of the library, and it had not been lying there any fifteen days, which is the length of time the family have been away."

"How do you know?"

"Bless you, I took it to a chemist. He assured me that to be as fresh as that the perfume must have been applied within two days at the longest. It is one of those volatile preparations that soon lose their strength."

"I don't see but your chain is complete, then, so far as it goes. No man ever carried that handkerchief. It must have been dropped by a woman. The woman was seen coming away after the hour at which the crime was committed. You haven't forgotten that perfume, I trust."

"Assuredly not. If I ever get near enough to the woman who uses it—but that's the trouble. I'm afraid she's not apt to pay me a visit."

"You must visit her, then. Meanwhile, what about the threatening letter which was written to North a week or two previous to the crime?"

"Bless me! I had nearly forgotten it. But what are we to do? The decoy letter is still unclaimed at the post office."

"Put an expert on to the handwriting. Get samples of the chirography of everybody who is likely to have suffered by the operation of the firm."

The idea was so feasible that Inspector Applebee determined to put it into effect at once. He left headquarters and hurried to the office of North & Stackhouse, where he hoped to find the junior partner.

Disregarding the crape on the door, which kept away less importunate visitors, Inspector Applebee rattled at the handle, and was quietly admitted by old Jobson, who seemed to have the outer office all to himself.

"Mr. Stackhouse?" said the inspector.

The old clerk covered his eyes with his left hand and pointed to the door of the inner office. Applebee understood the unspoken premonition of the old man.

"Poor old fool!" he thought; "he thinks the hour of the firm's disgrace has come, and that I am here to arrest his employer. Well, may be I shall, some day. But not yet—not yet."

He pushed open the door and went in without ceremony. Thornton Stackhouse started up from the desk at which he had been writing, his face flushed, his manner agitated.

The inspector expected some word of greeting—a grunt or a nod, if nothing more. But Stackhouse drew a full breath, set his teeth, and seemed to be waiting.

"Bless me!" thought the inspector; "he expects it, too!"

"Well, Stackhouse," he said, with a reassuring smile; "is there anything new in the case?"

Stackhouse sighed and shook his head wearily. His dry lips murmured:

"Nothing."

He evidently understood that there was still a respite, but it did not seem to comfort him. His eye suddenly fell upon the paper on which he had been recently writing. He furtively seized it in his hand and crumpled it.

The inspector, who observed this, immediately began to appear indifferent to Stackhouse's actions, and pretending to turn toward Jobson, stated his purpose in calling.

Stackhouse falling into the trap, seized the opportunity to tear the writing paper into strips, and cast it into the waste basket.

"May I be shot!" was the inspector's inward ejaculation, "if that basket goes out of my sight till I have gathered up those bits of torn paper."

Meanwhile he continued to talk about the threatening letter to North, which he held in his hand.

"It's altogether probable, Mr. Stackhouse," said the inspector, "that we have a very important piece of evidence here. It will require the most careful examination. Plainly, this is largely a matter of handwriting that we have to deal with. You have your stock books and so on available? I supposed as much. Be good enough to have the books, with all the correspondence of the firm that you can secure, brought here. I will have an expert in handwriting secured at once. Of course until after the funeral, your office will be closed? Very good; we shall be able to work uninterruptedly for a day or two."

Gradually all traces of Stackhouse's agitation disappeared. He accompanied the inspector into the outer office. The books were got out, Jobson was sent after the writing expert, and Stackhouse seemed to be eager and absorbed in the new quest. Applebee's opportunity came at last. Going into the inner office upon the first reasonable pretext, he hastily transferred the contents of the waste basket to his hat. Fortunately he had a large head, and his hat was capacious.

After the arrival of the writing expert the inspector did not linger long at the office. He suddenly discovered an errand. In five minutes he was locked in a private office alone, excitedly comparing, arranging, searching, and pasting. As the writing was only on one side of the sheet, patience

and a little mucilage soon effected a restoration of the whole. And this was the inspector's reward :

"Oh, Marion ! Oh, my beautiful and cruel wife ! I will not ask you to have pity on me, for I know you hate and despise me. I will not ask you to think of my suffering and despair, for I know you have made up your mind that I deserve the worst misfortune that a guilty conscience can inflict. But, oh, for your own sake, I beg of you to tell me what that wicked and unscrupulous woman, whose name was upon your lips when we parted, has told you ! If you knew what her purpose is, how she exists by blackmail and crime, you would be careful how you put faith in her. Perhaps she presented what seemed to be proofs. Remember proofs can be manufactured."

At this point the letter ended.

" Pshaw ! " grumbled the inspector, hugely disappointed ; " it's nothing but a wheedling love letter to his wife ! "

CHAPTER VIII.

APPLEBEE IS TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

THE course of professional duty which brought Detective Lamm to Swampscott shore on Friday also brought to the North villa, on the day following, Mr. Kingman F. Thomas.

A young and timid gentleman, of many aspirations but too little confidence, had been deputed to call at the house for such news as might be attainable. But Moffett, in all his dignity—before he had looked at Mr. Lamm's warning figure—Moffett had repelled the novice in newspaper work; and when Mr. Thomas reported himself for duty on Saturday morning, among the work deputed to him for the day was a visit to the North household at Swampscott.

Other newspaper duties so far encroached upon Mr. Thomas's time that it was not until evening that he took the train for Swampscott, and it was growing dark when he reached the house, which appeared almost deserted.

But Mr. Thomas's vigorous ring at the bell was answered by a pretty maid in mourning, to whom Mr. Thomas confided the fact that he was a friend of the late master of the house, and would be glad of the opportunity to see Miss Harwood.

Aunt Comfort in due time surged through the doorway of the reception-room, none too large to admit the comfortable passage of her portly form.

"This is Miss Harwood?" said Mr. Thomas.

"Yes, sir."

"Permit me to present myself. My name is Thomas. I have long known Mr. North in business circles; indeed, I may say that we met very frequently on social occasions also. Hearing of this sad event, I have called to offer my condolences, and to beg that, if my services in any capacity will be of value, you will do me the favor of putting them to the best use, though I know that, with Miss Harwood as head of the bereaved household, nothing has been left undone." This with a deferential bow.

Aunt Comfort sighed heavily, and then sat down resignedly.

"It's a great trial, Mr.—Mr. Thomas, thank you, Mr. Thomas. So many things, too, have come upon me. The poor young ladies are entirely overcome, and I have had to supervise all that has been done. But it's my place to do it—my place. Oh, Mr. Thomas, can you tell me one thing—where is my poor brother-in-law's body?"

Mr. Thomas, prepared for almost any possible query, found it entirely out of his power to understand the purport of such a question addressed to him.

"You don't know—nobody seems to have looked after the matter. What can everybody be thinking

about, with the Stewart body-stealing case so recent in mind, not to make sure that poor Mr. North's corpse is not stolen and held for ransom?"

Aunt Comfort swayed forward and back, and looked appealingly at the old-fashioned hall clock in the corner.

"I will make careful inquiries, madam, if you wish it," said the reporter, "when I return to the city."

"Thank you. Oh, thank you! A-h!"

"But I am confident that everything will be properly managed. There is Mr. Stackhouse."

"Oh, sir, you don't know. I couldn't say a word about the matter, not even to Mr. North's friend. But I will remark that circumstances have taken such a strange turn that Mr. Stackhouse will not be much concerned in the funeral arrangements. The only gentleman who is doing anything is Mr. Fetridge—a friend of the family; and I am so overwrought and troubled by these terrible events, Mr. —Mr. (Thomas, thank you), that I hardly know whether to hope he can be of much service to us or not."

Mr. Thomas brought his most approved glance of sympathy to bear upon the good old lady.

"You must be calm and firm, madam," he suggested. "Remember that everything depends on you—the young ladies look to you, naturally, in a time like this."

"Ah-h-h!" ejaculated Aunt Comfort. "They are acting very strangely. Of course, I couldn't

think of saying anything against them, for I love the poor girls, both of them; but I must say, sir, that it has been a trial to me to see how recklessly they have gone on here, without even listening to good advice."

"The effect of the sudden shock," hinted Mr. Thomas, respectfully. "They need a little disinterested counsel, my dear madam. Now if I could only see them as their father's friend and have a little talk with the young ladies, I am sure they would see matters in their true light and realize what a blessing it is to have such a prop and stay as you in a time like this."

Aunt Comfort furtively wiped her eyes, as she again swayed back and forth shaking her head.

"You are very kind and thoughtful, Mr.—Mr.—(Thomas, thank you)—and, you being a friend of their poor dead father, perhaps the girls will heed what you say. I would not think of allowing a stranger to see them. There were two callers here yesterday. One was a police detective. Perhaps he had a right to come. But the other was only an inquisitive inspector. Whether gas or water inspector I really do not know, Mr. Thomas. He forgot his place and the proprieties, sir, so far as to ask questions about poor Mr. North—oh, dear, dear, to think that we none of us know where the body is at this moment—but it is a satisfaction to me, sir, so far as a poor woman can have a feeling of satisfaction under such a terrible dispensation as this—it is a satisfaction to know that the gas man,

or water man, or whatever he was, with his badge on his breast, went away none the wiser."

"He was an impertinent fellow," Mr. Thomas commented. "I wish I knew his name—I might have him removed for such prying intrusion. You managed him beautifully, madam, I know. But there are some women—"

The reporter did not think it necessary to finish the sentence. Aunt Comfort's face showed that she appreciated the implied compliment.

"He gave me his name, sir, but I have almost forgotten it. Peachwasp—no, that wasn't it. Pearfly—Pearfly—some such name as that. It was not a common name."

Mentally, Mr. Thomas quite agreed with the lady on this point, though it was some time before, by a process of evolution, he was able to comprehend the fact that this unsatisfied visitor was no less important a personage than Inspector Applebee, of Boston.

"And the young ladies?" Mr. Thomas ventured to hint after a respectable pause. "This Mr. Fetridge is known to them and to you, of course—he is a friend of the family?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, sir," was Aunt Comfort's reply. "He has been a frequent visitor here for—let me see, let me see, it must be three years at the very least since we first made his acquaintance. There was a time when he didn't come so much, and we thought perhaps there had been some disagreement between him and poor Mr. North. But

he began to come again to the house, just as before. Yes, Mr. Fetridge has been very friendly with both our young ladies."

"I never heard Mr. North speak of Mr. Fetridge," said Thomas. "But if you know him to be trustworthy and honorable that is certainly sufficient assurance."

"Thank you, Mr. Thomas. Here I have been keeping you from the ladies. I am sure they will be very ready to see a friend of their father. And I do hope they will hear what you have to say."

"I can advise them to no better course, my dear madam, than to follow your own good counsel," said the reporter as Aunt Comfort took her panting course toward the door.

Sitting in his chair he could easily follow Aunt Comfort's progress by her ejaculations, partly natural, partly the result of her excitement of mind. As he waited her return, he thought, with pardonable self-complacency, on the facts which the good woman had disclosed, and wondered if it would be his good fortune to find the young North ladies half so ready to speak. He was aroused from his reflections by the reappearance of Aunt Comfort at the door.

But Mr. Thomas had no thought for the excellent aunt after his eyes fell on her companions.

Both young ladies were in mourning, and as they advanced, side by side, behind Aunt Comfort, it would have been difficult, thought Mr. Thomas, to

find two beautiful women more sharply and strongly in contrast.

The elder of the two responded to Mr. Thomas's bow, looked at him a moment with searching blue eyes that seemed to read the whole truth as to the motive which had brought him there, and then took her seat. In her haughty, handsome face the reporter saw the character of a woman of strong will and passions, tempered by pride and sensitiveness, rather than by power of reason and calm judgment. Her face would certainly never have furnished a sculptor with a model for Justice.

How different in all characteristics of womanhood was the shrinking, tearful girl at her side—scarcely seventeen, Thomas thought, as he looked at her pale, rounded face, and her slender, graceful figure. She lifted her eyes once to meet and acknowledge his glance, and her look of mingled appeal, fear, sorrow, and helplessness went straight to his heart.

"This is Mrs.—I would say Mr. North's elder daughter," Aunt Comfort introduced Marion. "And this is Miss Stella, his younger child. My dear girls, this is a friend of your poor father, Mr. Thomas. He takes a deep interest in your welfare, and will only be too grateful, he says, if he can be of some service."

Mr. Thomas inwardly congratulated himself that his was a real and no simulated interest in the case, for he felt perfectly sure that the orbs of this

blonde-haired, stately reserved woman would detect in an instant any pretence.

It was to Marion that he turned, but his thoughts, not less than his sympathies, were with her delicate, grief-stricken companion.

"I do not know that Mr. North had a single enemy in his business affairs," he began, "yet it seems plain that somehow or other he had gained the hostility of some person, and that person must have been concerned in this terrible crime."

"Just what the police detective said," Aunt Comfort interposed. "But if Mr. North had an enemy, it was certainly no one in this house."

She looked around for some words of confirmation, but Stella was still quietly crying, and Marion said nothing.

"Cannot you think of any person," resumed Mr. Thomas, "who might have had a grudge against your father? Any discharged employé?" He looked at Marion.

"I have no knowledge or suspicion of any such person," she said, coldly. "Possibly Miss Harwood may recall—"

"Mercy, child!" exclaimed Aunt Comfort, relapsing into old-time idioms in her excitement. "How you talk! There never was a servant discharged in this house but one parlor-maid, who was caught stealing Miss Stella's ribbons. May be, though," she added with a sudden thought. "She was a quick-tempered creature. Did she ever use threatening language, Stella?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Comfort," said the younger girl in broken tones. "Please do not ask me any questions. I cannot answer them."

"Let me speak for my sister as well as myself, Mr. Thomas," declared Marion, rising. "We neither of us have any idea whatever to express as to the possible or probable guilt of any one. We thank you for your proffer of assistance, but will not trouble you further at this time. Come, Aunt Comfort. Good evening, sir."

The two young ladies had left the room, with Aunt Comfort in unwilling tow like some unwieldy, harmless barge, before Mr. Thomas realized that the conference was at an end. One pleasant association only he carried away with him, the charm of the presence of the younger girl, whose gentle inclination of the head as she looked at him just before leaving the room seemed to accentuate his feeling that here was a helpless, beautiful girl, who appealed to his sympathetic interest, and whom, if occasion should come, he would most gladly serve.

Mr. Thomas, as he wrote of the day's developments in the North case, graphically presented certain facts, but kept others, quite as important, untold. Among these undisclosed matters the name and standing of Richard Fetridge in the North household were included.

There is no "rest day" in the reporter's week. Sunday came and brought to Mr. Thomas new duties. In all the daily papers of Saturday this announcement had appeared :

"The funeral of the late Paul North will take place from his late residence, Swampscott, at three o'clock P.M. on Sunday, June 19. Relatives and friends invited without further notice. Burial private."

In the throng that pressed into the house of mourning, it would have taken attentive observation to single out Mr. Thomas. But he was there among the first; a nod of recognition, given and returned, secured for him a place, after his own heart, where he could see all and not be seen. From this point of vantage, Thomas looked over the assemblage quite at his leisure, and noted many a face familiar in State Street and on 'Change.

Rather a young man in black, whom he remembered to have seen often, was escorted to a place of some prominence. He exchanged some whispered words with those in authority, and Mr. Thomas set him down, unhesitatingly, as Richard Fetridge. And Richard Fetridge it was, and none other.

Thornton Stackhouse, looking worn and almost haggard, appeared on the threshhold of the great parlors. He had been looked for obviously, for he was at once approached by the master of ceremonies, with his mourning face, and escorted to the seat reserved for him not far from the family group.

By some potent influence, Mr. Thomas's eyes, as well as his thoughts, were turned toward these silent, motionless women. Once more, it was not Marion but Stella who seemed to appeal to his heart. Once only he caught sight of her face, and its pathetic, frightened look again touched him nearly.

"What would I not give," he thought, almost wondering at the sudden feeling, "for the opportunity to help that poor girl! How I wish it were in my power to give her courage and hope."

Miss Harwood sat with Marion and Stella on either side, closely veiled. No other relatives were present, for Paul North's only brother—a Chicago merchant—was abroad with his family.

As the sweet, mournful strains of the funeral anthem were heard, the searching eye of Mr. Thomas noted the presence, in a seat not far from the central group, of the worthy Inspector Applebee.

Mr. Thomas's mental surmise was quite correct. Inspector Applebee was there on business. But the outcome of that visit surprised no one more than the officer from police headquarters.

The brief service had ended; the assemblage rose respectfully to permit the special mourners to pass through the room; and Inspector Applebee found himself directly before them as they went on, followed by many a sympathetic look

Aunt Comfort came a little in advance; and then the two orphaned girls, Stella walking on the side nearer to the watching inspector.

A subtle, delicate odor came to his sense as Stella stopped for a moment, so near that he might have touched her without lifting his arm—a faint, rare perfume.

Instantaneously the scent recalled a certain scene to the inspector's mind. His thoughts went from Paul North's villa at Swampscott to Paul North's

town house in Marlboro Street ; and he seemed to find again, where it had lain overlooked in the master's house, a bit of filmy lace.

There could be no mistake, the inspector said to himself, outwardly impassive, but every nerve quivering with excitement.

With Stella North, almost as if it were a part of herself, came that faint, yet penetrating and subtle odor which Inspector Applebee had known in all his life but once before : when he was keeping watch in the house where Stella North's father lay, cold in death.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER COVER OF THE NIGHT.

WHEN the yellow State House dome next came into Reporter Thomas's view that Sunday after the funeral, he had gained a deal of information about the people at the North villa.

Quite naturally, one of the first places he sought was the quiet office of Detective Lamm.

The door being locked between them and possible intruders, Mr. Thomas began his disclosures.

"At the present time, Lamm," he said, giving the office chair a twirl before sitting down in it, "there are two things which strike me as peculiar. There are two men in this case who naturally come under suspicion—one of them because he has no history; the other because his history is peculiar."

"And the man with no history is?"

"Thornton Stackhouse. You may or may not be aware of the fact that until he appeared in Boston ten years ago, he was unknown to anybody in these parts, and that of his earlier life there are only extant to-day the vaguest and most conflicting rumors. He never refers to anything in his life more than ten years old. So, as I say, he has no history."

"Umha!" said Lamm; "as you say, I may or may not have been aware of the fact. Well, then, as to the other man whose history is peculiar?"

"I referred, Lamm, to Mr. Richard Fetridge, the Apollo Belvidere of State Street, the ideal lady killer, the man whose personal appearance is the principal thing about him which would at once strike an observer.

"And why does this man begin to appear suspicious to you?"

"Because I can't exactly understand his relations to the North family, nor his motives in his relations to them."

"Tell me what you know and I'll try to help you."

"From what people down at the shore gossip, it appears that Fetridge made the acquaintance of the Norths at Swampscott three years ago. The young man was boarding at some hotel, met the young ladies, seems to have been particularly struck with Marion, the elder daughter, and began to go to the house a good deal. People will talk, you know, and people said that Fetridge was dead in love with the girl, and probably might have married her but for old man North's opposition."

"Ah!" Mr. Lamm lit a new cigar. "Didn't like the young fellow, eh?"

"May have liked him well enough, but didn't want a man without money for a son-in-law," rejoined Thomas.

"But Marion was not his own daughter?"

No. But he adopted her when she was a year

old, and he had no expectation of having a child of his own ; and North seemed to think as much of her after Stella came as before. Of course, one way of showing his liking was his anxiety to have Marion well married. At all events, the old man turned the cold shoulder to Fetridge, who was only a struggling lawyer, with nothing but his wits to depend on for a living. His visits to the house suddenly stopped. About two months after he ceased to call at the place, Marion North became Marion Stackhouse."

"There was plenty of gossip about that event at Swampscott, I'll be bound," was the detective's comment.

"Of course. Everybody said she married Stackhouse for money, although she was in love with the other fellow. Some people go so far as to say that Marion and Fetridge had some lovers' quarrel, and so separated. Other people, with whom Marion is no favorite, did not hesitate to say that the young woman, being one of the cool and calculating kind, agreed with her father that Stackhouse was a certainty and the young lawyer only a possibility so far as money interests were concerned."

"Fetridge is a rich man now," oracularly declared Mr. Lamm.

"Ah ! If friend North had dreamed that in a few weeks Fetridge would fall heir to a very handsome property in Australia, I think our friend Stackhouse would have been dismissed for the lawyer. It was an uncle, I hear, that left Fetridge

his fortune. Fetridge went to Australia to settle up the estate, as perhaps you know, not in the least expecting to get much of anything. But in nine months he came home, to everybody's surprise, himself included, a millionaire."

"Exactly; well?"

"Well, he began to feel drawn toward the Norths again. This time the old man was very glad to have him on good terms with the family. The almighty dollar, you know. I don't mean to slur a dead man's memory, but Paul North was a disciple of Mammon, if ever there was one in the world. The question in everybody's mouth is, how did Stackhouse attain his extraordinary influence over Paul North? I attribute it to his cunning catering to the old man's strongest passion—avarice. But not to digress. Fetridge visited the house regularly for a month or two, and it was gossiped down at the shore that the Apollo had turned his attention to Miss Stella. I am not at all certain as to the correctness of that assumption myself, Lamm."

"He may have had something of his former liking for Marion, you mean?"

Mr. Lamm found an answering look from his co-worker that made a spoken response superfluous.

"Just about a month ago, Lamm, professional business called Fetridge away from Boston. At any rate that was the explanation given by the young lawyer, who appears to have entered into

quite intimate relations with the firm of North & Stackhouse since he came back from Australia with his millions. A Water Street man I saw at the funeral told me he believed Fetridge backed the concern, and went away on some business connected with it."

"That's a mere guess," was the detective's comment. "We must try to get at the real cause for this trip. You do not imagine that any disagreement with the family or the firm could have been at the bottom of it?"

"There was no love lost between Stackhouse and Fetridge. The cause of their mutual dislike may or may not be hard to determine," said Thomas, in a meaning tone; "but I'm very certain, from what has taken place since Mr. North's death—Fetridge did not come back, you know, until two days before—that he is on quite as good a standing with the family as ever. The way in which he was trusted in the funeral arrangements shows that much, plainly enough."

Mr. Lamm knocked the ashes from his cigar, took a turn up the room, and coming back stopped in front of Thomas as he sat fingering his watch fob.

"There's a mystery about this man Fetridge," he said with emphasis. "What you have found out about him simply confirms my feeling, quite warranted by my own knowledge of the man and his circumstances, that Fetridge is a person to be very carefully watched. Mark my words, young man.

The day you find out what secret is shared by Marion North-Stackhouse and Richard Fetridge will mark a great advance in the progress of this investigation."

When detective and reporter parted, after some further interchange of views, a certain line of policy was agreed upon. Richard Fetridge was to be kept constantly in sight. For the goings and comings of the young lawyer in the city, Mr. Lamm declared his purpose to fully account, while Mr. Thomas was to be the sentinel on duty at Swampscott.

Not that he intended by any means to anchor himself down there permanently ; but he did propose to provide himself immediately with some means by which he should be kept informed of the movements of the aforesaid gentleman, and especially of his future associations with the North family. It was partly with this end in view, but more immediately with the intention of testing Fetridge by a personal interview, that he returned to Swampscott that very Sunday evening, arriving there just after dark. The hand of Destiny was more active in this expedition than Mr. Thomas could even in the remotest degree have imagined. Not only was the course of his own life determined thereby, but it is just possible that if he had deferred his visit until Monday, as a less eager investigator would have done, the North tragedy might have remained a mystery forever.

The slightest delay of the train, a difference in

the rate of his walk through the town, a divergence in the course of his thoughts—any of these things, upon so slender a thread do great events sometimes hang—would have been equally fatal to his eventual elucidation of the problem or the progress of the events recorded in this narrative.

But it happend that he was passing the North estate a little before nine o'clock, and that just then the whim seized him to enter the broad gateway and have a look at the silent, gloomy mansion upon which the heavy pall of death and ill-fortune had visibly fallen. There might be something stirring—some face, some light, some whispered conversation, perhaps—or was it that the sweet, sad face of North's orphaned daughter still haunted him and lured him out of his path?

At all events it would not necessitate much of a delay, for the abiding place of Richard Fetridge was but a short distance beyond. At first sight it did not seem possible that he should gain anything by entering the grounds. There was not even a light visible from his standpoint on the driveway. It might have been, thought Mr. Thomas, some long abandoned ruin for all the semblance of life that could be seen about it.

He was turning away, when his attention was attracted by a noise close by him as of a window cautiously opened, and immediately after he became aware of the flutter of white skirts at a window in the second story. Instinctively he drew back into the bushes. The night was dark, but the phos-

phorescent gleam that seems to distinguish objects even in a dark landscape, enabled him to see that somebody had emerged from the window and was coming down a trellis work into the garden. He heard the snapping of the frail wood work, the cracking of the vine that clung to it, and finally the precipitate, probably unintentional, drop to the ground, and the accompanying thud. But the figure gathered itself up quickly—came toward him—passed him—breathing with audible excitement.

It was a figure veiled and closely muffled in a long cloak—the figure of a woman.

"Is it one of the servants?" Thomas asked himself, as he observed her hurried steps until the gate was reached, her backward glance, as if hesitating for a moment whether to go on or to return, and then a quick, almost headlong flight directly up the street in the direction of Marblehead.

"She cannot be going to the town, at any rate, whoever she may be," was Mr. Thomas's mental comment. "Is she a thief or a servant? I shall make it my business to know more about the matter, at all events."

With a stealthy tread, quite as noiseless as that of the cloaked figure hurrying before him, Thomas followed the woman, keeping her as well in sight as the darkness would permit.

Regarding one point there could be no doubt in the watcher's mind. The fugitive knew the road she was taking, and followed it with a fixed purpose.

Mr. Thomas began to find it a matter of some difficulty to keep her within view, especially as the thick foliage made the darkness in some places very black indeed. Suddenly the woman left the road, and ran across the lawn of a private estate.

Thomas hastened after her, expecting to see her enter at the servants' door. But, to his surprise, she avoided the house, and eventually came out upon the rocks behind it, overlooking the sea.

"She is going out upon the shore," muttered the reporter to himself, as he saw her climbing down out of view from the higher land on which he stood.

It was a moonless night, and only now and then could be observed the trembling light of a star. Most of the sky was heavily overcast, but near the eastward, where the cloud and the ocean seemed to touch, there was a broad band of comparative light.

Do what he might in the way of precaution, the reporter stumbled once and fell heavily. Fearing that the sound might have startled the human magnet that had thus drawn him toward the ocean's verge, Thomas did not rise for a moment. But when he gained his feet and looked cautiously ahead, the figure was still going onward at unchecked speed.

"Utterly absorbed in what she has in mind," thought Thomas. "And going straight toward the water too! I don't know much about this district, but I think there is a little point of rocks out yonder, just in the direction the woman is taking.

What if the creature should have come to this lonely spot at night to end her life?"

Startled at the thought, the reporter made haste, so that in case of emergency he might be ready to act.

Nearer and nearer he approached the unknown wanderer. She stood still at last upon a rock that overhung the water that plashed monotonously along the long beach.

The night wind swayed the folds of her cloak as she remained there for a moment like a statue.

Her veil, too, was blown to one side, but her look was out to sea, and the eager eyes of the watcher, crouching now in a little grassy hollow close at hand, could not catch even a fleeting glimpse of her face.

Suddenly, with a quick motion, the woman drew something from her breast, and cast it waterwards with all her strength. The effort seemed to exhaust her, for she sank down a moment, clasping her hands before her face.

The weakness was only transient. With nervous hands she pulled the veil over her face and wrapped the long cloak closely around her. Almost headlong was the haste with which the figure turned toward the road again.

Looking neither to right nor left, she passed very near the man who had thus played the spy upon her. No affrighted fawn, thought Thomas, could have run more fleetly, under the spell of any dread whatsoever.

For an instant the reporter was in quandary. He desired to do two things at once—to follow the fleeting figure : to stop and investigate. He stood up, looking after her.

"Queer thing!" he thought. "She is not going back to the North villa; at least, not by the same route by which we have come. She continues on the road toward the Philips Beach station. Can it be that this woman has been kept here in hiding, and is going away? Perhaps, if I hurry, I can still overtake her."

He stumbled hastily across the rocks to the place where she had stood when she threw the something, which had aroused his curiosity, toward the water. It was well nigh a hopeless quest. He stood for a moment in the very attitude which he had seen her occupy, the lonesome swash of the sea in his ears, measuring the distance with his eye, and trying to calculate the limit of her force. He walked down slowly in a straight line to the very edge of the water. The tide seemed very near the flood.

"Quiet hopeless. Not a chance in a million," he said at once. "But if I mark the spot and the height of the tide, by daylight to-morrow I can investigate with possible chance of success."

He was looking about him for some object by which to secure the necessary landmarks, when his glance was attracted to a glittering something on a point of rock about which the water flowed. Even as he looked a wave dashed over it, obscuring it

for the time, only to leave it gleaming in a reflected light again as the dark element receded.

An astonished, incredulous stare! No, it could not be; yet it would pay him to make sure!

He drew off his shoes and socks and prepared himself for the effort of investigation. A few cautious steps brought him so near that there could be no mistake. He uttered an involuntary cry, and plunging forward, regardless of a thorough wetting from an unexpected wave, grasped the glistening object in his shaking hand.

It was a pistol!

CHAPTER X.

WHO IS SHE?

IF Reporter Thomas had been previously curious about the identity of the fugitive from the North household, this curiosity had suddenly intensified into acute anxiety now that he had discovered the nature of her misson to the water side. Rather than she should escape him at this moment he would willingly forfeit a month's salary. He felt the keen excitement of the man who finds himself on the verge of a momentous discovery.

Thrusting the pistol into his pocket, he hastened to assume his clothing, and, at the top of his speed, made up the road in the direction the woman had gone. He reached the Phillips Beach station, only to find it black and deserted. There was the solitary figure of a man crossing the open space near by. Thomas hastened to accost him.

"Has the last train gone, sir?" he inquired.

"Train!" echoed the man. "There is no train from here to-night. The train leaves from Swampscott station at 9.26. It's not a great way down the track, but I'm afraid it's too late," he added, looking at his watch.

A sudden thought came like an inspiration to the reporter.

"You didn't see a woman running down that tract a moment or two ago, did you?"

"Why, yes," returned the man, evidently struck with the coincidence. "I did. She asked me the very same question you did, and started off in chase for the train, but it was a good ten minutes ago. The fact was, the whole thing struck me as so peculiar that I went after her a bit, but somehow she gave me the slip. I must say I never saw a woman who could get over the ground so fast."

Thomas waited to hear no more, but was off like an arrow down the dangerously dark road bed.

It was a fruitless chase. Entirely out of breath, he reached the Swampscott station just in time to see the doors closed. A man bearing a lantern eyed him curiously as he came upon the platform.

"Last train's gone," he said, curtly.

"I know," said Mr. Thomas. "It's rather hard luck that of mine to-night. Fate's against me sure. I had a mishap—a ducking, as you see: and what with one thing and another, I have been baulked every way. I wouldn't care only that a lady was to meet me here and go to Boston with me in the train."

"Lady with a veil and long cloak?"

"Yes."

"She went on in the train without you, my friend. Sorry for you, but there's one chance yet. You may catch that horse car into Boston, by way of Lynn, if you hurry."

Mr. Thomas was perfectly aware of this fact, but

he thanked the man with the lantern very gratefully and set out on a run for the corner indicated.

The car was passing just as he arrived, and Thomas went with it as it rattled its slow way into Boston—a slowness that was magnified a hundred fold by the reporter's keen impatience. He was anxious to examine the weapon of which he had so strangely become possessed, but he did not consider it prudent to do so until he was free from observation. The opportunity arrived at last under an electric light, in a quiet street in the city.

"Calibre?" he mentally commented. "Thirty-two! I thought as much. The old-fashioned four-barrelled pepper-box of a kind in use before the war. Ah! Sharp's patent, 1859. Probably a reminiscence of North's younger days. Breech-loading too. There's no aim to the thing at long range; but it's a deadly weapon in a hand-to-hand conflict. And it contains at present? Let's see. How do you get the confounded thing open? Ah! by this little button above the trigger. So, so. Three full cartridges and one empty shell. The smut of the powder is still upon the muzzle. Recently fired, and not yet cleaned! Why, what fool could have taken so little pains to conceal a guilty fact?"

He hastily thrust the pistol from sight and drew a long breath. A coincidence was out of the question. He no longer doubted the importance of his discovery. Luck—or was it fate?—had strangely favored him.

Mr. Thomas walked toward Scollay Square in deep reflection.

"Servant or some one in hiding," he queried. "One or the other, assuredly. If a servant, we must look for another motive than any Lamm and I have considered. If some one in hiding, protected at the house by some other person knowing of the crime, then it is all the more necessary that Swampscott should be watched. I may have to leave town. If so, Lamm must be kept informed."

By this time Mr. Thomas had reached the borders of the district where life is stirring, n[illegible] well as day.

It was late, but not so late that the hack always inclined to social propinquity, were not [illegible] to be found in their accustomed haunts.

By all the groups gathered in smoky "all night" restaurants, or talking over the merits and demerits of their respective teams, Thomas was welcomed as a friend of long standing.

He took their chaffing about the outward and visible signs of his wetting with characteristic good-humor; and between repartees that brought a broad grin to the faces of his associates, managed to introduce certain terse questions as to the matter in hand.

"Eastern depot? Why, Big Jim had a fare from there to-night. Here, Big Jim, leave off your palaver with the dames at that table a moment and come and see Thomas!"

Obedient to the summons, with ready good-will,

Big Jim nodded to the reporter, and was presently seated with him at a conference carried on by both parties in an undertone.

"The fare was a woman, Thomas."

"A woman is what I'm looking for."

"Well, this one was so wrapped up I couldn't make much of her looks; but I will say this, she wasn't old, and she was scared at something or other almost to death."

"Where did you take her, Jim?"

"To the Albany."

"To the Albany!" Thomas's face fell.

"Yes, sir; just there. She said to me in a quick sort of way, like as if frightened at something, 'Hackman, wont you please take this money and buy me a ticket for Hartford?' To be sure I would, and did, old man. The woman was all of a tremble when I put the ticket and the change in her hand. She mumbled out something or other—thank you, I suppose—and ran to the train, although she had fifteen minutes to spare: that eleven o'clock express, you know. Something wrong with her, of course?"

"I don't know that, Jim," answered Thomas, cautiously. "I guess she can't be the person I wanted after all."

The two parted excellent friends as always. For an hour or more the reporter worked at his desk. Then he curled up in his chair for a nap, impressing upon one of the "night-owls" there on duty to wake him at 4.45 without fail.

When the gong clashed at the Albany station at five the next morning, among the passengers on that early train—well-named "accommodation,"—was Mr. Thomas. In one hand he held a copy of the city edition of the morning *Boston Globe*. The other held a ticket to Hartford.

It was 10.30 before the Charter Oak city was reached. Mr. Thomas's first efforts brought him into contact with the Jehus of the Connecticut capital.

It was not at all a difficult matter to find the whereabouts of the solitary hack driver who waited for a chance passenger on the night trains; but Tom Ludlow was asleep, and the reporter found the time on his hands until noon.

"How are you, sir?" said Ludlow, stretching himself and yawning as he met the inquirer who had been waiting for his awakening. Both were at the door of the hotel-stable. "A lady fare? Yes. She's safe enough. Friend of yours—relative!"

Mr. Thomas thereupon set forth, with much earnestness, that he had missed the young woman through an unavoidable accident, that they were going to a friend in Hartford, and that he had been much disturbed over the fact that she had been obliged to make the journey at night alone.

"Naturally," he said in closing, "I am anxious enough about her. She's a timid girl; too young to be out alone like this. But I couldn't help it. I hope you bestowed her safely somewhere. At her friend's, I suppose?"

The coachman flicked a fly off the post near which he was standing with great accuracy.

"You are wrong there. Her friends were out of town. The girl did not know what to do; cried and took on. Course I felt sorry for her, and I drove her to the hotel. Knowing the night clerk, I just said a word in his ear that the lady was all right, and he gave her a room. Curious, though, why she'd wrap herself up so! I didn't get a peek at her face at all."

"She's not been well at all recently. Fact is, the journey was partly taken on account of her health," answered the reporter. "But I am greatly indebted to you for the kindness you have shown her under these unfortunate circumstances. Here's a two-dollar bill to prove it. Take it, man; it's all right. And now where is the lady?"

"In the house, yonder," returned Ludlow, pointing with his whip. "I registered her name as 'Miss Brown, Boston.' The clerk will find out for you whether she is up yet."

The City Hotel register bore the name, and the clerk listened with professional courtesy to Mr. Thomas's statement of the case.

"We've not seen her yet," he said. "Very likely, however, she may be up and dressed by this time. I will send up your card if you wish. Front!"

Mr. Thomas, taking a blank card from the pigeon hole, wrote hurriedly the following name, which a bell boy soon carried to room X.:

MR. WILLIAM C. WATERSTON.

"Whoever she may be, she will be frightened, I suppose, at reading this elaborate name," Thomas thought. "But I must see her at all hazards."

In a moment the boy had returned, bearing the card in his hand.

"I knocked two or three times, sir, pretty loud, but couldn't make any one answer," he said. "There wasn't a sound in the room that I could hear."

The sudden look of alarm on Thomas's face was not lost upon the clerk. He glanced at the clock, and noted that the hands pointed at half-past twelve.

"Tell the chambermaid of the floor to open the room," he said.

While the order was being carried out, Thomas stood motionless at the desk, the prey of a vague apprehension.

It was the chambermaid herself who came to the office with the key of room X. in her hand.

"There's no one in the room," she declared, with eagerness. "The bed has not been slept in, and the woman must have stolen away during the night."

Mr. Thomas looked blankly into the clerk's face. A very slight lifting of the shoulders was the only comment of that functionary.

The reporter caught its meaning. "The poor girl must be out of her head, and is wandering about somewhere," he said. "Permit me to pay the bill for her lodging." The clerk bowed. "Should she chance to return while I am away," he added, "you

will detain her, I am sure courteously, but firmly. How unfortunate! How very unfortunate!"

"It is barely possible that the lady may have been frightened away, if she was in a state of nervous prostration as you intimate," remarked the clerk, more cordial in manner now that the little account for the night's lodging had been settled. "But, upon my word, I cannot understand why. There were only five or six other guests on the floor, and they were quite people, all of them."

Once more Mr. Thomas betook himself to the neighborhood of the stable and was fortunate enough to find Ludlow there, making ready for his accustomed call at the railway depot.

"Who were in the office when you left the young lady last night?" he asked. "Can you recollect?"

Ludlow pondered a moment.

"Let me see. The night clerk. The night porter."

"Of course. Anybody else?"

"Why, yes. Stern was there—Officer Stern. A policeman, you know. Merely having a friendly chat with the clerk."

"Do you think the lady noticed him?"

"May be so—may be. Anyhow, Stern noticed her. We all did. How could we help it? Muffled up, nervous, hurrying off to her room."

Quite certain that in this unexpected apparition of a policeman, he had found the cause of the disappearance of the fugitive, Thomas set out once more on his search.

The first trace of what might perchance prove to be the fugitive was found, half an hour later, at a little restaurant much frequented by early market-men not far from the waterside.

"Yes, a woman like you describe came here about four o'clock this morning," answered, to Thomas's inquiries, the old man who kept the place. "She took a cup of coffee and a sandwich and asked me the road to Windsor Locks. A very pleasant-spoken female. She thanked me kindly through her veil when I showed her. I told her she had better sit down and rest awhile; that the streets and roads were no place for a woman at that hour. Then, if you'll believe it, she started up and ran away. She took that street yonder toward East Hartford bridge. I had half a mind to call after her that she was going the wrong way if she wanted to get to Windsor Locks, but she was out of sight before a cat could wink, and I couldn't leave the shop. Out of her head, you tell me? Poor creetur!"

The street which the reporter now followed led directly to the river and the bridge separating the busy capital from the quiet village of East Hartford.

A sudden thought as he approached the stream sent a chill to his heart. He stopped at the boat-house to ask if anybody had been seen to pass during the night, but no watch had been kept. After most perplexing uncertainty for several moments, Thomas decided to cross the river and seek for developments in the little town beyond.

A milk wagon was jogging on to the accompaniment of jingling cans, as Thomas turned into the broad main street. It halted at a pleasant farmhouse not far from the river.

"Just back from the city?" asked Thomas of the pleasant-looking man, with sun-tanned, hairy face, as he laid the reins over the back of his well-fed bay.

"Yes, sir. It takes a goodish while to make my rounds."

"Pardon my question, but it is one of great interest and importance to me. When did you set out?"

"A little after four."

"And did you chance to meet a woman, all wrapped up in a cloak, on your way over?"

"Ah!" answered the milkman, interested at once. "I told Jim there was something queer about her. Yes, I did see her, and stopped her, too, just about where you are standing now, sir."

"The poor woman is not responsible for what she is doing," said Thomas. "I am searching for her now."

"Ah!" The milkman smacked his lips in his eagerness. "Take her in charge, eh?"

Thomas nodded.

"Well, sir, she is as quick a traveler afoot as I ever see, man or woman; and goodness only knows where she has got to by this time. It was so uncommon to see such a figure that I took a pretty close note of her hurrying along from the bridge,

and I put myself right in the way all of a sudden on purpose. She gave a little frightened scream, and put out her hand to me appealing like. It was as white a hand as I ever see, sir; she's never had any rough work to do, I'll be bound, poor thing!"

"'I'm not meaning you any harm,' I says to her, while Jim, like an idiot, stood staring at her over the gate with his mouth open. 'But for a young woman like you to be racing along mad-like at this hour of the night, it isn't exactly the right thing, is it, miss? I put it to you frankly, you know.' She clasped her hands despairingly, and said, 'You don't know! You can't know! Do not try to stop me, for mercy's sake!' But I see the poor thing was wellnigh fagged out, and I just took her arm and walked her into the kitchen, where my good woman stood quite dumfounded. 'Sit you down there,' I says, putting her into a chair at the table. Breakfast hadn't been cleared away, as good luck would have it. 'Wife,' says I, 'give the girl as good a warm meal as you've got. Now you must eat and drink; you must make out a good breakfast,' I says, shaking my head at the girl, 'or I shant let you go. If you don't want us to look at you, all right: we'll keep away. But whatever your errand, you need strength to carry it out.'"

Thomas was listening with impatient eagerness, but he could not forbear a word of sincere thanks.

"Don't mention it," said the farmer. "Who could 'a done different? Well, to make a long

story short, I watched her eat, but I must say a canary bird might have made out a bigger breakfast than did this frightened, trembling creature. We begged her to stay and rest, wife and I, but she wouldn't hear of it; and, after thanking us both like a lady, she set out Burnside way, and Jim and I went over t' the city. Poor girl! Out of her head? Well, well, tell you what: better get a team somewhere. She's far ahead, you know."

No better advice could be offered or followed. In a few moments Thomas was driving the fastest horse the village livery stable afforded; and clouds of reddish dust marked his rapid progress eastward.

He heard of the fugitive twice.

Once she had stopped to drink at a wayside well, and a group of children had watched her as she rested a moment and then went on, closely cloaked and veiled, though the morning was sultry.

Once she had stopped at a farmer's door for a glass of milk—for a sick traveler in the road above, she had said, in hurried explanation—bringing the glass back after a moment with faintly-spoken yet earnest thanks.

As his horse slackened his pace just as a difficult sandy hill was being surmounted, Thomas's glance, taking in the broad expanse of landscape, brilliant under the rays of the westering sun, caught sight of a solitary woman's figure on a slope to the left.

The roads crossed just at the summit of the hill; and, urging his horse to the utmost, Thomas soon

came within view of the figure again ; this time not far away.

Did the unknown journeyer have some premonition that she was pursued ? It would seem so, for she started like a hunted creature as the sound of rapidly-rolling wheels drew nearer, and ran into the thick wood that skirted one side of the road as if in desperate search of refuge.

Thomas leaped from his carriage and was at her side in an instant. His touch on her shoulder seemed to paralyze all power of motion.

She gave a stifled cry. The long cloak, already tangled in the thicket, fell to her feet. With a last vain effort to go on, she staggered and reeled.

As she fell, fainting and worn, in his arms, the veil that had concealed her features for so many a weary hour became freed from its fastenings and drifted away.

"Good heavens!" Thomas almost gave way himself in the shock of discovery and the following revulsion of feeling.

"Stella North!"

CHAPTER XI.

IN DANGER.

REPORTER THOMAS had no time to construct theories to account for what had happened. For whatever reason, Stella North was the woman he had unwittingly followed, and Stella North was the woman who now lay in his arms, as devoid of life, to all appearances, as the twigs upon which her dainty feet were dragging. He looked into her face for the moment with helpless irresolution. The dictates of common humanity would have impelled him to pity her, but it was no ordinary pity that filled his soul on this occasion. He had been aware ever since the day she flashed upon him that appealing glance as her sister was leading her from the room at Swampscott, of a peculiar interest more romantic and tender, perhaps, than he as a matter-of-fact man was free to admit to himself.

But the present emergency demanded prompt action. He could see plainly enough that it was not merely fright that had caused her to lose consciousness. Nature had bestowed upon her a face charming in its natural roundness of outline and ready always to break into dimpled smiles ; but,

alas! horror and deprivation of sleep and food had wrought a wicked change in a few days.

As she lay with her head thrown back, her lips parted, her eyes closed, her hair strayed recklessly about her temples, she looked as if she had just died after a painful illness. Thomas hastened with her out of the sight of possible curiosity. A few steps brought him deep enough into a protecting wood that fringed the roadside, and here, in the leaves beneath the trees where the birds were singing, he laid her gently down. His experience in the art of restoring fainting women to consciousness had been extremely limited, but he believed in the efficaciousness of alcohol, and always carried when traveling for use in an emergency a flask of brandy. A little of this strong remedy poured down the throat half-strangled the victim, but it awoke her. Her eyes opened and she regarded him languidly. He had seen a dying bird look just that way.

"Come, Miss North, you feel better now, don't you?" he said awkwardly, as he supported her head upon his arm. And then when a sudden betrayal of fear and shame surged into her white cheeks he hastened to add—"There now, there's nothing to be afraid of. Not the least in the world."

She made an effort to disengage herself and to arise, but she was very weak, and she only sank back again with a pathetic sigh. The tears came into her eyes at once, and she was unable to con-

ceal her weakness or to check it. Faster and faster they chased each other down her cheeks. Her face was wet with them.

Thomas watched her with increasing consternation. He who had time and again passed, apparently unmoved, through the most terrible and heartrending of scenes, had now to make a great effort to retain control of himself. But as a matter of fact it is improbable that the girl detected any evidences of agitation in his naturally imperturbable countenance.

"Come, Miss North," he murmured, "this will never do. You must not give way like this. Don't despair. If there is anything wrong, you may depend upon me to help you all I can."

"Oh, it's not I who need the help," she moaned, quite light-headed by reason of her long sufferings; and grasping his sleeve with her little hand she exclaimed with sudden, passionate intensity, "Oh, don't let them arrest her. Don't let them hang her. Marion never could have done it in her right mind. She was out of her head, you know. You are sure she was, are you not?"

This unexpected entreaty was a surprise, but it was a most welcome one to Thomas. He had not had an opportunity for deliberate thought since he had recognized who it was that had thrown away the compromising weapon with the suspicious smudge upon it, and fled from the North villa in the most damaging of circumstances; but in a vague, general way, his heart had been conscious

of the weight of the accepted theory that she was in some way implicated in the dark work of the tragedy. And now these wild, hysterical words, delivered under the pressure of her overstrung emotions, gave him more than a hope that she was innocent of any part in the hideous crime.

Innocent! How could anybody look upon this child and doubt her innocence? Reporter Thomas certainly could not, and he gave up trying to, with a feverish alacrity that was not entirely characteristic of him. Comprehending enough of the situation to enable him to act intelligently, he began at once a long attempt to soothe her. And behold another miracle! This stern man, whose stoicism was the wonder of his associates, had suddenly become as patient, as gentle, and as delicate as a woman. He smoothed her hair. He wiped away her tears. He induced her to take a little more of the brandy. By repeatedly assuring her that her sister was in no danger, and afterwards by turning her attention to other things, he brought her once more into a condition of sanity. She was not permitted to test her strength upon her feet, but she sat up against a tree, and began to regard her companion with great, round, wistful eyes, with an air of mingled timidity and impulsive confidence.

"And now, Miss North," said Thomas at last. "It is absolutely necessary that I should leave you for a few minutes. Will you promise me not to stir until I return? I will be gone just as short a time as possible."

"You are so kind," she said faintly. "If it is for me, you are going, I hope, really, you wont trouble yourself. In a few minutes I shall be stronger and can go on."

"We'll talk about that after I come back," he said cheerfully. "And meantime I have your promise not to stir?"

"Since you are so good, I can refuse you nothing," she returned wearily, and closed her eyes.

Thomas was off at an energetic pace. He first tied his horse to a tree, and then ran on to the nearest farmhouse. A well-to-do-looking woman, with a sunny face, appeared at the door in answer to his knock.

"Madam," said Thomas hastily, "I have to apologize for my unexpected call, but the fact is, I am in great need of food—the best you have and plenty of it. I'll pay—anything. Only let me have it at once."

"But I can't," said the woman; "I haven't a thing in the house to eat!"

"But I must have something," exclaimed Thomas; "if it's nothing but milk and water. The case is very urgent. Here, do what you can for me."

He thrust a five-dollar bill into the good woman's hand. She thrust it back promptly.

"Here, I don't want your money," she said rather stiffly. "Such as I have you're welcome to. Come in."

She led the astonished Thomas into an ample pantry, which was in a condition of neatness that was almost painful. But it needed no power of divination to determine that it was the pride of the good woman's life, and the shelves fairly groaned with good things. Thomas was dumb with delighted amazement.

"Well," said the housewife, evidently enjoying the condition of stupefaction to which she had reduced him, "do you see anything you'd like? If so, you are welcome."

"The—the fact is," stammered Thomas, "I wish you'd let me pay for it. I—I—you see I might carry away a little more than I'd like to; for the fact is I've got a friend just back here in the woods, and she—he's starving to death."

The woman laughed outright. Of course, she did not believe that anybody was dying for the want of food in this land of plenty. The best Thomas could do was to effect a compromise. The woman accepted "a dollar for the heathen." Thomas took away all he could well carry.

As the reporter approached the place where he had left Stella North, he began to have some fears that she had deserted him in spite of her promise; but, no. There she was, still sitting against the tree, as he had left her. No, not as he had left her. Completely exhausted, she had fallen asleep.

Thomas placed his bundles upon the ground and softly arranged the repast he had secured from the

farmhouse upon a light robe he had taken from the carriage. From the bowl of fresh milk to the golden-brown custard pie it was genuine and wholesome ; and though he would fain have had Young's chief cook at his command for an hour or two, still he hoped that she could not fail to find the display attractive and appetizing.

But he hesitated to wake her. The poor child slept as only one utterly worn out can sleep. He looked at her more attentively, and his heart accelerated its pulsations.

" What a pity," he thought, " that she should be so compromisingly mixed up in such an affair as this ! Young and charming as she is, if the police knew what I know they would not hesitate a minute to arrest her."

The thought clouded his brow. He looked at his watch. It was getting late. Unless he proposed to turn her over to the police, in truth, time pressed.

" Ahem ! " he exclaimed. " Miss North ! "

But her sleep was too deep to be disturbed by such an expedient. He placed his hand gently upon her shoulder, and a thrill ran through him at the contact. She started up and stared wildly about her. Gradually the truth came to her. She awoke from a happy oblivion to the horror of the past few days. The sudden frightened look in her face proclaimed this fact. And then her eyes wandered from the reporter's face to the collation spread at her feet.

"For me!" she exclaimed. "Oh!—"

But nothing but tears bespoke her thanks. She was evidently ashamed to betray herself so; but she was too weak to prevent it. She covered her face with her hands and sank down at the foot of the tree.

"You think me foolish, I know," she stammered.

"Not a bit of it," said Thomas. "I think your nerves are quite unstrung, because you haven't taken nourishment enough. Eat something, Miss North, I beg of you; and, my word for it you'll feel better."

By dint of much persuasion and adroit management he reassured her, so that she actually smiled the very ghost of a smile, but it betrayed the presence of a merry dimple in her cheek, which Thomas thought quite charming.

"How can I thank you?" she murmured.

"By eating all you can," he returned.

And she did endeavor to show her gratitude in that way. From time to time she looked at him with a glance of dread and apprehension.

"You are not afraid of me, Miss North, I hope?" he said at last, pleasantly. He was smiling now, as he sat on a rock near by watching her eat, which she did with that ravenous appetite that comes of absolute starvation.

"Excuse me," she said, after an evident effort, "but you are the same gentleman who called at our house—who used to know my father?"

Thomas flushed a little and his eyes fell.

"Miss North," he said, "I don't intend to deceive you. I am a newspaper reporter."

She uttered a slight scream and dropped her knife and fork into her plate. At another time Thomas would most certainly have laughed aloud at the unmistakable consternation produced by the announcement of his profession. As it was, he repressed his tendency to smile when he saw her lips whiten under the cruel apprehension that had sprung to life within her.

"You mistrust me, Miss North," he said, gravely.

"Oh, no," she returned, in a voice barely audible. And added immediately, "For pity's sake, sir, do you intend to print what I told you when I was so crazy awhile ago?"

"Do I, Miss North? It depends upon whether or not you go on with your dinner."

"Oh, how can you joke about a thing like this?"

"Miss North, I am not joking. I never was more serious in my life. It is absolutely imperative that you eat."

The poor girl tried to propitiate him by swallowing a few hasty mouthfuls, but it was evident that he had taken her appetite away. She regarded him with a look of pathetic appeal.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed suddenly, "I am only a poor girl, and chance has placed me completely at your mercy. Don't torment me, I beseech you. Tell me the worst at once. What do you intend to do with me?"

"To save you," answered Thomas.

"To save me?" she repeated, helplessly. "From what?"

"From the consequences of your conduct."

"Mine!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean? I have done nothing."

"Pardon me," said Thomas. "You forget the pistol which you threw away, and your flight from home."

She stared at him for a long time like a statue.

"And you believe—" she began at last, with an awful look in her face.

"I believe nothing," he interrupted, "so much as I believe you, Miss North. It is not a question of me, but of the police."

"The police!" she stammered.

"Miss North," said Thomas, "I would not frighten you needlessly, but I feel compelled to tell you that you have placed yourself, in the eyes of the law, in a very equivocal position. Unless you can give a full explanation of your conduct—"

"Oh, sir," she broke in, "I can tell the police nothing—absolutely nothing."

She wrung her hands and looked about her apprehensively.

"It's not because I am guilty of anything—oh, sir, you know that! But I cannot say what I have thought, what I have been compelled to believe in spite of myself. I have said things to you already when I did not realize what I was doing which I never meant to have repeated to any human being.

And you—on your honor, sir !—wont you keep my secret ?"

"I will do everything I can for your sister for your sake," said Thomas. "But I must ask you one question. What reason had you to believe her guilty ?"

"I do not believe it. No, I will not acknowledge that I ever really believed it. But for one moment when her strange actions seemed unaccountable upon any other supposition, I—but it was a mistake, sir. I am sure of it. She could explain everything if she would."

"There, there !" said Thomas, soothingly. "Don't get excited. You are as safe with me as you could possibly be with any one. I simply wanted to have the assurance from your lips that you are unaware of the fact of any crime."

"Oh, believe me, sir."

"I do, Miss North. I believe you implicitly, and I will do everything in my power to help you."

"You are very noble, sir."

"You flatter me," said Thomas, averting his eyes. "I have sisters of my own and—"

The girl clasped her hands.

"And for their sakes—"

"No, for your sake," said Thomas, turning quickly to look toward the road.

"You spoke of that dreadful pistol, sir !" she cried suddenly. "Tell me how you know !"

"I saw you, Miss North."

"And the pistol is—"

"In my pocket."

She stretched out her hands impulsively, while a wild light of hope lighted in her face.

"Give it to me," she exclaimed.

"Forgive me," said Thomas, "but I must refuse you that. Believe me, it pains me to be obliged to refuse you anything."

"You—wont give it to me," she faltered. "And what, then, do you propose to do with it?"

"I will be frank with you now as ever, Miss North," he said, in a low voice. "I intend to give it to the police."

She swayed, but his arm prevented her from falling.

"Come! come!" he exclaimed, in a quick whisper, as for the moment he held her close to his rapidly-beating heart. "Be a woman! Do your duty as I shall do mine! I have promised you my protection—my utmost effort on behalf of yourself and your sister. Miss North, will you trust me?"

Impulsively she brought her face very near to his and turned the light of her blue eyes full into his dark ones. It was an intense, fearful, searching stare; a look such as one might cast into the future at a fork in the road of life between lasting happiness and despair. His gaze never faltered, but hers did. She blushed, and suddenly became self-conscious, and precipitately looked down at the ground.

"I will," she murmured faintly.

"You are in imminent danger," he said hastily. "There is no time to lose. Follow me."

And as he turned from her she obeyed him with the trusting confidence of a little child.

CHAPTER XII.

THOMAS DECLINES TO STATE THEORIES.

ABOUT ten o'clock on Monday morning a telephonic message came over the wires from the chief of police at Lynn to the Boston police headquarters which seriously interfered with the habitual imperturbability of Inspector Applebee.

"Whatever does this signify?" he demanded of the chief inspector. "That youngest North girl has disappeared."

"No!" exclaimed his superior, in a tone of surprise. "How can that be?"

"I don't know how it can be; it is," Applebee declared. "She left the house some time last evening. They did not discover her absence till this morning. A hurried search of the neighborhood traces her to the railroad station, where she took the last train for Boston."

"That's a queer family, anyhow," commented the chief inspector, with a very puzzled air. "Applebee, have you tried to ascertain whether there isn't insanity in the blood?"

"Plague take it! What was I thinking of not to have put a man to watch her last night? I thought of it, but it seemed an absurd precaution!" fumed

the inspector. "However, her flight the minute the funeral is over does away with any lingering doubt I may have had of her complicity in the crime."

"Better put White on her track at once. Then see me and let us have a word or two."

Inspector White having been despatched to the Eastern depot with instructions to find the fugitive at any cost, Inspector Applebee returned to the private office of his superior. The chief carefully closed the door.

"Applebee," he said, as he resumed his chair, "if I understand you definitely, there is nobody, so far as known, who benefits a cent by North's death except his daughter Stella?"

"Exactly, inspector. You are to understand just that. There is not the slightest indication of robbery or theft. Both the property in the house and the personal property on North's person were intact. Nobody benefits but this girl. Just two months ago he took out a ten thousand dollar policy in her favor in the Penn Mutual."

"And are you sure he has effected no other insurance?"

"I cannot find that he has, or that he ever did."

"Isn't it rather peculiar that he waited all these years and then made her his sole beneficiary in this way?"

"I don't know. His other daughter is married, and he probably considered her amply provided for, and the outlook of business affairs might have

warned him that it would be prudent to heave over an anchor to the windward. But, whatever his reason, the fact is indisputable. There it is, in black and white. The woman who used the perfume I have been looking for is the sole person to profit by Paul North's death. It's a curious coincidence, to say the least, that the two clues should implicate the same person. And yet a seventeen-year-old girl like this—oh, I can't believe it; that's all."

"Applebee," said the chief, "I begin to realize that we are in a very delicate position in this matter. It calls for our nicest discrimination and judgement."

"I should say as much."

"Let us see what we know. We have established circumstantially beyond a reasonable doubt the identity of the woman who was in the Marlboro Street house at or after the time of North's death; the woman who, to say the least of it, must be an accessory after the fact."

"So, indeed."

"Instead of some adventuress, the woman turns out to be North's own daughter, a mild-faced, innocent-looking girl of seventeen."

"So, indeed."

"Well, now to my mind, unless the girl is crazy (and we have no evidence that she is), she never could have shot her father."

"It's a pretty serious thing to charge her with it."

"You don't believe it?"

"I'm hardly prepared to dispute the evidence."

"Very well, then, there is only one exp anation. She knows who did it, and she runs away to avoid questions."

"It looks so."

"And as she never could reconcile her conscience to such action unless the guilty party were very near or very dear to her—"

"Stackhouse again!" said Applebee significantly. "There's no way out of it. Unless something turns up in his favor, I've got to arrest that man."

"It looks so. But I shouldn't like to make a mistake."

"Nor I. It's not like taking some poor beast into custody. A mistake like that only redounds to our discredit."

"Very well. Wait a day or two. Something more must come out. Let us find this girl. It wont take much to frighten her thoroughly. She will tell us everything she knows. Meanwhile, you are sure Stackhouse cannot take French leave?"

"Trust me for that. McMannus and Robbins are both keeping their eyes upon him. So long as he behaves himself he can do as he pleases. At the first cause for suspicion they will bring him in."

There was a knock at the door.

"Mr. Mendell," said the messenger, "to see Mr. Applebee."

"It's the writing expert," said Applebee. "Send him in."

Mr. Mendell appeared, bearing under his arm a small portfolio.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," was his greeting. "And what do you think of the news? No surprise to you, I suppose."

"What news?" questioned the chief inspector, gruffly.

"Why, the collapse of North & Stackhouse, to be sure. What, hadn't you heard?"

The two officials were staring at each other.

"Where did you hear that, Mendell?" Applebee asked.

"Where? Everywhere. It's all over town. Of course circumstances make everybody talk about it. All sorts of rumors are afloat as to the cause of it. Some say it wouldn't have occurred but for North's death. Others say it had to come anyway—that it was only a matter of time. But, plague take it! that wasn't what I came for."

"What do they say is the cause of the firm failing?" asked the chief inspector, with every appearance of intense interest.

"Well, as I hear it, they've been doing business lately chiefly on wind. Oh, it's an awful smash up. They say Fetridge, the young millionaire, was a considerable loser. In fact, they say all sorts of things, as they always do at such times, but I don't know how true they are."

"Who is this Fetridge?" the chief inspector inquired of Applebee, as if the name were new to him.

"Why, he's the man who came here to get us to search the house in Marlboro Street last Thursday. A friend of the family, I believe. At any rate, he was at the funeral."

"And what are the rumors, Mendell?" pursued the chief inspector.

"About Fetridge? Well, it's reported that he held the firm up by the nape of the neck, as it were, until North's death, out of regard for the old man; but that Stackhouse tried to see him since and got the cold shoulder. They say that Stackhouse and Fetridge are anything but friends."

"Quite so," said Applebee. "But, turning from gossip to business, what's your report?"

"Well, gentlemen," returned Mendell, briskly opening his portfolio and extracting therefrom several papers, "I don't know that I can help you a great deal, but I'm satisfied of one thing. Out of all the specimens of writing which Jobson presented for my inspection, there are not five which could have been done by the party who prepared the anonymous letter."

"There are four then?" said Applebee.

"Just," returned Mendell, spreading the samples upon the table; "and there you have them."

"And how about your preference?"

"I have none. You see, the writing of the original is too shaky to be a good guide. It is evidently a disguised hand, but at the same time not disguised by a person who understood how to disguise handwriting. Evidently when he had written

it he thought, because it didn't have the general appearance, to his eye, of his own writing, it was consequently sufficiently blind to deceive anybody. I don't believe the peculiarity of the formation of the letters ever occurred to the person."

"Who are these parties?"

"Three of them are business men. The fourth was formerly a clerk in the firm's employ, but was discharged, I believe, for drunkenness."

"Pshaw!" said Applebee. "I know these three men. They're none of them in need of money, and would not have taken that means to get if if they had been."

"It remains, then, with this other fellow—Willard Smith—eh?" said the chief inspector. "What do you know of this man's history?"

"Nothing but the few words that Jobson accidentally let fall," replied the expert. "He said that the man was young and industrious. That he invested every cent in Nicaragua Midland, lost his money, and took to rum as a consolation."

"That's our man," said the chief inspector positively. "Applebee, let's get to work on this at once."

There was no time lost. Inspector Applebee and his assistants were soon scouring the city for information concerning Mr. Willard Smith, late clerk with North & Stackhouse. But the quest presented some unexpected difficulties, and when Tuesday morning came it had not yet achieved success.

Applebee was scarcely awake on Tuesday morning when the following telegram was placed in his hands:

"HARTFORD, CONN., 6 A.M.

"Important! Meet me at headquarters at 11.

"WHITE."

"Does he bring Stella North with him?" was the grave question that persisted in Applebee's mind during the intervening time. "If so, I am confident that we are nearing the end of this perplexing case."

He communicated his anxiety to the chief inspector, and both men waited with impatience the coming of the man who had gone in quest of the mysterious fugitive. Alas, for their hopes! Inspector White was quite alone.

The three men were closeted together as soon as he arrived.

"Not a trace of her?" exclaimed Applebee impatiently.

"Slipped through my fingers like a fish!" said White. "Circumstances very peculiar. Whole thing mysterious: more than mysterious—suspicious."

"How do you mean?"

White placed his hand impressively on Applebee's shoulder, and though the door was shut, spoke in almost a whisper:

"I tell you, man, it is one of two things. That girl's either made away with herself or she's had help to escape."

"It's likely enough that she had help to escape," observed the chief. "But I know of no good reason why she should go outside of the State of Massachusetts for the purpose of committing suicide."

"Wait till you have heard me," said White eagerly. "Observe the facts carefully. I traced this girl to the Albany depot, and through the hackman, who bought her ticket to Hartford, was able to go direct to her stopping-place. There I expected trouble. Not a bit of it. Everybody knew about her. Why? Well, I'll tell you why. Somebody had got ahead of us; that's all. A black-haired young man about thirty years of age, who wrote his name William C. Waterston, had been up in the morning making inquiries all over the place, representing her as insane."

"Evidently an assumed name," muttered Applebee apprehensively. "Couldn't you get a full description?"

"You may be sure I did, even to the cut of his shoes. But wait a bit. I haven't got to the end. This young man hired a carriage at East Hartford and started out upon the road in chase of the girl. That he overtook her I have positive evidence. That she thereafter disappeared and that he went on alone I'm equally well informed."

"What?" ejaculated Applebee.

"Just as I tell you," said White. "I traced this woman to a certain place on the road between Hartford and Buckland. Abruptly all trace of

her disappears. She is seen in conversation with this man, and not again by anybody in either direction. Meanwhile the man kept on alone. He was seen by several people by himself in the carriage. He drove clear to Vernon, sent the carriage back to East Hartford by a messenger, and there he disappears too."

"Great powers!" exclaimed the chief. "We're outwitted."

"For the time it would seem so."

"For the time!" echoed the chief irascibly. "Don't you see what this means! The girl was a greenhorn. The man was an expert. I'll bet you a hundred dollars he had that girl all the time in the bottom of his carriage. Why didn't he go back to Hartford? Can't you see his purpose? The New York and New England Railroad runs through Vernon. By this time both principal and accomplice are safe in the city of New York."

The two assistants stared blankly.

"At any rate," said Applebee, "it plainly demonstrates one thing. We're dealing with professionals."

"Professional what?" asked the chief angrily. "What is there in the line of a professional about this affair? Was there any theft, any property missing? This isn't a burglary, my friend; it's a murder."

"So, indeed," said Applebee. "But professionals have been hired before now to do a job of

that kind. It's no use for you to tell me that this chap doesn't know the ropes, inspector."

The chief seemed struck by his remark, and became thoughtful.

"Write out the fullest possible description of the man," he said to White. "We'll see what we can do; though I'm afraid we've botched it."

Inspector White took out his notes, and, seating himself at the table, began immediately to comply with the request. In the midst of the work a messenger ventured to bring a card to the door.

"Humph," said the chief, "Kingman F. Thomas, of the *Boston Globe*, is here, and he says that his business is important and immediate."

"Let him come in, then," advised Applebee. "I tell you that man cut his eye-teeth years ago. If he says important he means important."

The chief gave a sign of acquiescence, and shortly after the door opened to admit Mr. Kingman F. Thomas. Quietly dignified, and entirely master of himself, as upon all occasions, the reporter cast a quick glance upon the group. Without a word he advanced to the table, inserted his hand in his breast, took therefrom something enwrapped in a newspaper, and laid it down before the chief inspector.

"What is it, Thomas?" queried Applebee curiously.

"Look at it," returned the reporter briefly.

The chief undid the wrapping and took out an old-fashioned 32-calibre, four-barreled, breech-

loading pistol, about eight inches in length, and stained with rust in several places.

Everybody started and looked eagerly from the weapon to the serious face of the man who had brought it.

"It is just as I found it," he said quietly, "with the exception of the rust. I took it out of the water, and I didn't care to wipe it much, for fear of destroying the smut on that empty barrel."

"Well," said the chief, with an assumption of indifference, "why do you bring it here?"

"I considered it my duty to do so, sir."

"To be sure; but what makes you think so? In other words, where did you find it?"

"I found it in the water on the shore at Swampscott."

"Swampscott!" ejaculated Applebee, who began to examine the weapon with avidity. "The deuce you did! When?"

"Sunday night, about nine o'clock."

"Sunday!" echoed the chief inspector sharply, "and it is now Tuesday morning. You were evidently in no haste."

"I went out of town by a very early train on Monday. This is the first opportunity I have had, gentlemen."

"How came you to be wading in the water at Swampscott after dark, Thomas?" questioned Applebee.

"Well, sir, it wont take me long to tell you what

little I know about the matter. I stipulate but one thing. This must not be given to the press. You agree? Very well. I was passing the North villa when I saw a woman enveloped in a long cloak stealing out of the garden. I followed her, deeming her appearance suspicious. She went toward the shore, and I thought I saw her throw something into the water. Waiting till she had gone, I waded out and found this. I ran up the street, hoping to catch her, but missed the last train in. She seems to have been in better luck."

The three inspectors exchanged significant glances.

"And you didn't see her face, Thomas?" Applebee eagerly inquired.

"I did not; no."

"And you have no idea who she is?"

Thomas hesitated a moment before replying.

"I don't know that I care to state theories. You have enough of your own."

"Well, Mr. Thomas," said the chief at last, "I think you are entitled to our most sincere thanks for important evidence in the North case. Still, in matters of this kind delays are dangerous. It does seem as if you might have found some way to get this to us before this."

"I preferred to deliver it in person," said Thomas quietly. "I never take any chances in a matter of this importance."

"You prefer to be slow but sure, I suppose," said the chief, smiling. "Well, Applebee, here it

is. It wont take you long to verify your suspicions about it."

"I rather suspect that Thomas has already done that," Applebee said.

"I took that liberty, yes," agreed the reporter.

"To whom did you take it?"

"To Comfort Harwood, Swampscott."

"When?"

"This morning—the only opportunity I have had."

"And what did she say?"

"She positively identified it as the property of the late Paul North."

This appeared to be the extent of Thomas's information. When he went out, White said with a smile:

"Bless me if that man wouldn't stand as a model for this description I am writing."

"Eh!" exclaimed the chief inspector, turning suddenly in his chair. "Applebee, watch that man!"

"What? Thomas?" cried the subordinate, in amused amazement.

"That same Thomas," said the chief dryly; "unless you want the newspapers to get ahead of us in this matter. For I tell you that man knows more than he has told us."

CHAPTER XIII.

STILL THE MOISSOT WOMAN.

EARLY in the morning of the Monday, when Thomas was on his way to Hartford, Detective Lamm unlocked his office door. Almost the first object to catch his eye as he entered the room was a folded note lying upon the floor.

"Am called out of town on an important clue," ran the brief lead-pencil message. "Will see you as soon as I get back. Meanwhile, look out for developments at Swampscott.

"TH."

John Lamm was puzzled and curious, but, as he had already taken the additional precaution to put both Moffett and an intimate friend of the butler, the parlor-maid at the North villa, upon his salary list, and was reasonably confident that they meant to serve him faithfully, he was not particularly anxious.

He opened his desk, ran through the letters that had come, and then sat back in his chair to hastily peruse the morning *Boston Globe*.

"Not a thing new in the case," he mentally commented. "What a lot of words that man Thomas can string together about nothing, and yet leave the impression on our minds that we have really

been reading something important! Evidently he didn't think his clue ripe enough to give it to the public."

He turned the paper over carelessly. Suddenly he started and clutched the newspaper with a nervous grasp.

"Hullo! Hullo!" he exclaimed aloud. "What the deuce does this mean?"

For there, staring him in the face, was this:

"WANTED.—Information concerning the whereabouts of Marie Moissot, formerly of New Orleans, recently of New York; Creole extraction; 27 years of age. Large reward will be paid for reliable information, if sent immediately.—Address, D. 196, *Boston Globe* office."

"Well, this is a coincidence," Mr. Lamm reflected. "The same day that my advertisement to the same effect appears in New York, the advertisement of some other party appears in Boston. Now, who is it?"

A prolonged reflection, leaning back in his chair under the stimulation of a fresh cigar, was unproductive of a satisfactory answer to the detective's query. But the reverie ended in active measures.

He suddenly arose, closed his desk, locked the office, and went out. Bending his steps in the direction of the *Boston Globe* office, he was soon conversing with one of the clerks, but the result was not propitious.

"Oh, we don't pretend to know who puts in any of these 'wants,'" the clerk said. "There are too many of them. We know these advertisers only

by the tickets. When a man puts in a want, we give him a ticket, dated and numbered with a stamp. That ticket is good for mail for ten days from the date of it."

"Did you take this 'ad' yourself?"

"Haven't a doubt of it; but I took no note of the person who presented it. Couldn't even say whether it was a man or a woman."

The detective returned to his office and began a search for suitable writing material. He was not long in finding what he wanted, for his desk was amply provided with stationery adapted for all possible contingencies. Selecting a modest envelope, notepaper of a poor quality, a fine pen, and a bottle of pale ink, he took infinite pains to produce the following:

"D. 196, 'BOSTON GLOBE' OFFICE,

"In answer to advertisement of this A.M., would say I have information that may be useful. If you care to see me, will be at corner of Shawmut Avenue and Dwight Street at 7 P.M. Look for lady with red cherries on her bonnet.

"CONFIDENTIAL."

Examining with a critical eye this effusion, John Lamm became convinced that he could not better it, sealed it, and hastened to the post office with it. On his return he found one of his assistants in the office.

"You know where this lady lives in Shawmut Avenue?" he said, presenting a name on a bit of paper. "Well, get down there before she gets

away, and tell her that I must see her at once on important business."

The man departed, leaving John Lamm in sole possession of the office.

Eleven o'clock brought him news of the failure of North and Stackhouse, news which he received with admirable imperturbability.

"And how much do they fail for?" he asked his informant.

"Everything, I hear. Even North's personal property is likely to go. His town house and his house at Swampscott."

"And in that case, how much of an inheritance does he leave his daughters?"

"Ah, poor things! Nothing!"

"So, so," said John Lamm to himself, after his informant had departed. "That's how the wind blows, does it! Well, it remains for me to find out who profits by North's death, and who by the failure. Certainly it is neither Marion Stackhouse nor Stella North."

The detective was not aware of Paul North's little transaction in life insurance, and it is not probable that it would have made much difference in his opinion if he had been.

But John Lamm's attention was now taken by the arrival of his assistant in company with a keen-eyed woman about five-and-thirty, modestly dressed.

"Ah, Miss Dallison! Good-morning," said the detective cordially. "Are you engaged to-day?"

"Some things on hand," she said, in a brisk, business-like way; "but if it's important—"

Lamm waved his hand toward the door of his inner office, and the lady preceded him into the small retiring room which the detective preserved for his most important conferences.

"And now, Bill," said Lamm, turning to his assistant, and speaking in a low tone, "I want you to go to Swampscott. You know where the North villa is. You will easily find it without any obtrusive inquiries, you understand. At the upper right-hand corner, at the part of the house away from the water, is a square tower with green blinds. If a small white handkerchief is placed over the sill go to the servants' door and deliver an express package to Mollie White. Take that receipt along with you and have her sign for it. She will leave what she has for me in the book. See? If there is no signal by four o'clock, you may come back."

When Detective Lamm had despatched his assistant, he locked the door and saluted his female caller over again.

"Allow me to pay my respects to the only female detective in America who is worth her bread and butter," he said. "How are you?"

"Is it because I'm so good or the rest are so poor, Mr. Lamm?" she returned. "Or because there isn't much money in your case, and you want me to work cheap? Or what?"

"No, Miss Dallison, I don't want you to work cheap," replied Lamm, becoming serious and draw-

ing up a chair near to her. "If you can do what I want I shall willingly let you put your own price on it."

"Well, what is it?"

"I can't say yet just what it will be. I have taken the liberty to make an appointment at your house with a party unknown at seven this evening. If the party puts in an appearance, you will have the simple task of finding out all he or she knows, while pretending to give him or her some information which you do not possess."

"Really," said Miss Dallison, sarcastically, "it is very simple indeed."

"Unfortunately," said Lamm, "there is no other way that I can see to get the information necessary. I will tell you how the case stands." And producing the copy of the *Boston Globe*, the detective proceeded to explain his plans. "You see," he said, in conclusion, "I merely desire to have you personate the writer of the letter I wrote this morning, and to draw out as much as possible about the purpose of publishing that advertisement from the person who turns up in answer to my note. There are two things I wish to find out—the first is, who inserted the 'ad,' and the second is, what is wanted of Marie Moissot. And, incidentally, if I can find out who this Marie Moissot is, why so much the better."

Miss Dallison was exceedingly dubious about the result, but as she was willing to try, after arranging the matter more in detail, Lamm made an

appointment at her house for seven o'clock, and bade her "good-morning."

"Good heavens!" muttered Lamm to himself, when he was alone, "this is the first time I ever was employed in a case where I was obliged to go to such trouble to find out a few facts which the man who employed me could give me in five minutes, if he only would. Is it because he doesn't care to, or because he doesn't dare to? I'll find out, or my name isn't Lamm. I always like to know what sort of a man I'm working for. It's convenient sometimes."

With these reflections, Mr. Lamm betook himself to other matters connected with his puzzling and thus far unsatisfactory quest, for he really hadn't got far enough along to be able to form a theory that positively seemed reasonable to him.

His assistant returned during the afternoon.

"The white rag was out when I got there," he said. "So I went to the house at once and returned by the next train."

He handed Mr. Lamm a message sealed in an envelope, which (relieved of the peculiarities of its orthography) contained information as follows:

"Stella North has run away. Her bed was not slept in last night. Miss Harwood had to force open the door. When she saw the way the room was she fainted dead away. Mrs. Stackhouse attended her. She was very pale, but did not say anything. Moffett said she had a 'distracted' look about the eyes, but I couldn't see her different than usual. As soon as Miss Harwood came to, Miss Marion (she has forbid any of us to call her Mrs. —), sent Moffett to Mr. Fetridge's house.

He came over right away. They had a long talk, which I did not hear. Then Mr. Fetridge took Moffett away with him to look for Stella. Since then Miss Marion has been in her room walking up and down. I don't believe she has sat down once. Just keeps walking all the time. She must have walked six miles. Moffett says that Mr. Fetridge sent him to the police office, but he didn't go himself. Nobody knew when Miss Stella went out. She went up to bed very early, and we thought she was locked in her room to cry. I hope this will be of service to find her, as nobody could wish her any harm."

"P. S.—She is very different from her sister."

"Ah! that woman is a rough diamond," murmured Mr. Lamm, as he conveyed the letter to his capacious pocket-book. "A professional couldn't have done much better!"

"But in the name of wonders," his thought continued, "what does it all mean? If it had been Marion I might have understood it—but this seventeen-year-old baby! There is some salient feature in this case that I haven't yet come across. Now, what is it? Where shall I look for the missing link?"

Profoundly abstracted and reserved, John Lamm continued to be throughout the remainder of the day. All the way to the house on Shawmut Avenue, whither he betook himself rather in advance of the appointed time, he was not in a condition to recognize acquaintances or know of what sort the weather was. His mind was wholly absorbed with the knotty problem that the North case now presented. The latest development in it had aroused a new train of suspicions.

Once inside the modest rooms of the woman detective, however, Lamm threw off the burden of speculation and devoted all his energies to his immediate purpose. The windows of Miss Dallison's front chamber (her suite was on the second floor) overlooked the corner to which Lamm's letter of the morning was designed to lure the author of the mysterious want "ad." The detective reasoned that if the advertiser was as importunate as he appeared to be, he would surely call for answers before night, and unless there was some more tangible reply from another quarter, the decoy was sure to bring him. And he was quite right. Miss Dallison was already arrayed in the bonnet with the red cherries, and stook at his side looking with him between the half-closed blinds toward the opposite corner when the clocks struck seven.

"Thornton Stackhouse, as I live!" exclaimed Lamm a moment later, "and prompt to the minute! There is your man," he said quickly, pointing him out. "Bring him here. I will be in the next room as arranged. If he asks you any questions, wait a bit before answering. If the feather sways twice, it means say 'yes'; if once, it means 'no.' If not at all, you are left to your own discretion. You generally will be."

John Lamm referred to a large peacock's feather ornamentally arranged over a book-case. He had connected it with the adjoining room by a bit of silk thread.

A very few minutes thereafter Miss Dallison and

Thornton Stackhouse entered the front chamber. The man took the seat offered to him, back to the book-case. If Miss Dallison had been familiar with his personal appearance, she could not have helped observing that the lines of care in his face had deepened heavily since the day of his partner's death. He had the sleepiness, worn expression of an anxious watcher by the bedside of a serious illness.

"Well, well, woman," he said abruptly, in no very conciliatory tones, "I trust after bringing me here you don't disappoint me. What do you know of this Marie Moissot? Speak quickly, for my engagements are pressing."

"Well, now, my dear sir," began Miss Dallison in a nervous, high-keyed manner, very unlike her natural self, "you'd better understand me, to begin with. I'm not going to betray any confidences that I may have made with any of them as I may be pardoned for calling friends without I know the why and the wherefores of it."

"What do you mean?" asked Stackhouse darkly. "Do you expect me to tell you my business with her before I know anything about you? You must think me a fool. I offered a reward for information, and came here to get it; not to give it."

"Very well, indeed, sir, so you did," returned Miss Dallison with a very shrewd air of suspicion. "But you have to satisfy me that you don't mean no harm to a body, for I'll not speak a word to injure any friend of mine. So that's just what you and I have got to settle before we go ahead."

"Well, in the first place," said Stackhouse, changing his tactics, "suppose we settle whether you have any information about the person that I want. Describe the woman you refer to?"

"Oh, sir! I'm no good that way. She was about twenty-seven, dark, quite dark—well, medium height, I should say—and what I call reasonably good-looking."

"Ah! and what is she doing for a living?"

"Oh, there's where I can't answer, you see, until I find out why you want to know."

Stackhouse made an impatient gesture.

"Has this woman you speak of been in Boston lately?"

The feather swayed twice.

"I see no harm in saying 'Yes' to that, sir. No harm. But more I wont say. You see, sir, circumstances are peculiar. She confided me that circumstances are peculiar."

"You mean to say, don't you, that she was here for private purposes, and that she wanted her presence here kept a secret?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Have you known this woman long?"

The feather swayed twice.

"A good many years, sir."

"And under that name all the time?"

"I decline to state what names she has gone under," said the woman, with considerable asperity. "You may be one of them detective fellers. How do I know? Coming up here to pump evidences

out of a poor woman as has herself to look after. I know fast enough—I know the woman you want. I knew it the minute I read that in the paper. But I aint going to be caught in no trap, nor I aint going to get into no trouble. So there's how the land lays, and you may as well know it first as last."

Stackhouse seemed to be sitting on pins and needles.

"Hang it!" he cried. "Don't be a fool! I have no wish to harm her, nor you either. I only wish to see her; that's all—to talk with her."

"Well?"

"Is she in Boston?"

"That I decline to say, sir."

"Ah!" said Stackhouse, coming to his feet. "I see she is, or you wouldn't be so cunning about it. Now, where is she? In this house? Tell the truth. Didn't she herself send you to answer that advertisement? As a matter of fact, isn't she listening to this very conversation?"

He made a sudden movement toward the half-open door behind which Lamm stood. But the woman was quicker than he was, and she intercepted him.

"Don't you dare, sir!" she cried, standing with her back against the door. "She may be and she may not be; but if you attempt to go into that room, I'll scream for help."

"Ah!" said Stackhouse significantly, "as I thought. You are too smart, woman. You have betrayed yourself."

"Well, then," said the woman doggedly, "you can't see her; that's all."

"Oh; that's what she told you to say, is it?"

"Never mind. You can't see her. If you've got any message for her, write it, and I'll see that she gets it, and she will reply by mail. You can't see her. You ought to be ashamed to try to, after treating her as you have." This sole real bit of information which Miss Dallison possessed outside of the patent facts of the advertisement, delivered at this opportune time, must have dissipated any doubts still lingering in Stackhouse's mind.

"Very well," he said, in an altered tone, "I will write to her." He turned toward the outer door, and Miss Dallison followed him. He had actually opened the door to pass into the entry, and she was quite off her guard, when, with a quick spring, he leaped back into the room, thrusting her aside, and before she could prevent him, had flung wide open the door to the adjoining chamber.

But John Lamm was too old a bird to be caught in any such trap. At the first intimation of Stackhouse's suspicion he had taken his departure.

The room was empty!

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. LAMM COUGHS BEHIND HIS HAND.

"SLIPPED through your fingers again, didn't she?"

If the mocking face of Miss Dallison could be depended upon, that business-like woman seemed to enjoy the discomfiture and anger of her victim very keenly. She took up her hat, shook the dust from the deceiving cherries, poised it a moment in her hand, and then said—

"Well?"

Mr. Stackhouse acknowledged his defeat with a very grim sort of smile.

"You're a clever pair, you two," he said shortly. "Where's paper and ink? Have you got such things in this pantomime-trap of a house?" looking with a scowl round the room he had found empty.

"Ah! I thought you'd turn sensible after a while," rejoined Miss Dallison, briskly producing writing materials from the caverns of what a casual visitor would have pronounced a wardrobe, but which was much more—a very arsenal of belongings, some curious for their oddity, some commonplace enough, but all designed for instant use, when wanted by this extremely wide-awake woman.

Mr. Stackhouse did not find the flow of ideas quite to his liking. He began and tore up two letters, carefully bestowing the fragments in his watch pocket. Finally he seemed to find an inspiration, and his pen went rapidly over the paper, while Miss Dallison perused the pages of the morning's *Boston Globe* with every appearance of lively interest.

"There!" the visitor said at last, tossing his pen aside and sealing up the letter. "Give that to Marie Moissot, and mind you tell her before she opens it that she will do well to keep it entirely to herself."

"The lady knows what she is about," was Miss Dallison's response.

"I hope she does," was Mr. Stackhouse's rejoinder, as he took his hat, and, without any ceremonious words of adieu, proceeded down town.

Wherever he went or whatever "surcease from care" he may have sought in any quarter, one thing is certain—he did not make immediate claim upon the attention of Detective Lamm.

But shortly after his departure, that busy gentleman had the satisfaction of rejoining the triumphant Miss Dallison and of reading the following enigmatical epistle:

"MARIE:—Your part in the conspiracy to bring about my ruin, which was carried out on the 17th of this present June, is perfectly well known to me. I make no foolish complaints. You have accomplished your revenge. My name is clouded with suspicion. My hopes of fortune are destroyed. Let me have frank, fair treatment now, such as a victor can well afford

to give a vanquished man: and whatever I can save from the wreck of North & Stackhouse shall be yours. I have not forgotten the old days at Lake Pontchartrain. I am aware that I am not entitled to ask for mercy. But by the same means that you have done the mischief you can undo it. Will you not? The reward will be enough to satisfy your conscience. I cannot speak more definitely upon paper. I must see you in person, and have a talk with you about this. Even if you refuse meet me face to face, You do not know how much I may say to you.

"T. S."

Detective Lamm was still puzzling in a highly-excited frame of mind over this letter, when Tuesday afternoon came.

"I wish I had Thomas here to talk it over," was his unspoken thought as he gave his office chair a twirl. "Where is the man all this while?" he said aloud.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when a well-known knock was heard. Lamm's face brightened, and brightened still more when he admitted to his little room of counsel a moment later Mr. Kingman F. Thomas.

"Why, Kingman, where have you kept yourself all this while? Sit down, sit down, and give an account of yourself."

Mr. Thomas parried this impetuous salutation and query with a question of his own.

"An account of myself?" he said, laughing. "Perhaps you think my time's my own. Did you never hear of such a thing as a journalist being sent out of town to do a given bit of work for his paper, John Lamm?"

The detective nodded his head and looked at Thomas in a quizzical sort of a way.

"Oh, yes, Kingman. But they don't generally take a man off a murder mystery case like this and send him out of town on some chance affair; at least they didn't do that when I knew the office routine. Got a new editor down at your place?"

"Nonsense, Lamm," answered Thomas. "Emergencies may arise at any moment in a newspaper office. You know that well enough. I was pulled off the North case for a little while; but they put me back again with lightning-like celerity, as you see, for here I am. Now, what have you got to tell me?"

"First of all, Kingman," the detective said, tipped comfortably back in his chair, "I want to tell you that I'm a little surprised, to put it mildly, that you should have let that young North girl give you the slip that night. How did it happen?"

"The fortune of war," rejoined Thomas, for the moment quite interested in the row of law books on the shelf above Mr. Lamm's desk. "The best of us get beaten sometimes—even you. Of course, you have forgotten—"

"I've forgotten nothing, Kingman," said Mr. Lamm. "Let it pass. The matter can't be helped. Of course I knew it wasn't your fault. And now to another subject."

The detective consulted his little memorandum book, and took from its leaves Stackhouse's letter.

"Never mind to whom it is written," he said.

"What do you think of it, taken in connection with what we know of this man Stackhouse?"

Thomas read the letter twice before answering.

"Looks as though there might be some conspiracy. I should like to know who this Marie really is."

Mr. Lamm silently acquiesced in this wish, but he said nothing on that point.

"We have talked over our friend Stackhouse considerably, Kingman, first and last," he observed, "and I fancied we agreed pretty well for a while."

"For a while?" queried Kingman. "What do you mean?"

"People change their minds sometimes, and I have modified my first opinions regarding the man," continued Mr. Lamm, following the pattern of the wall paper opposite his desk with his eye. "A decidedly abler man is this Stackhouse than a good many people give him the credit of being—abler than I thought at first. He is a smart man—a 'slick' man, as they say up in New Hampshire. The way in which he has managed to keep North & Stackhouse out of bankruptcy all this while shows that he has plenty of nerve and a good deal of skill."

"Not much use without money," was Mr. Thomas's sententious comment. "You know what people say about it. Firm would have gone to smash long ago if it hadn't been bolstered up. And all the financial fellows that I have talked with give the credit for keeping the firm out of deep water for three months past to one man—Richard Fetridge!"

"He's a curious sort of character, that Fetridge," said the detective contemplatively. My opinion is that without his money he would amount to but precious little."

"You wouldn't put him down as the Napoleon of State Street, then?" hinted Thomas.

"No," replied Mr. Lamm. "Why, the man hasn't half the ability of Thornton Stackhouse. There is a queer streak in the fellow, and it shows itself at every turn. Pig-headed enough, but lacks balance. Really weak-minded, for all his obstinacy in small things. That's my judgment of the man. What do you say about him?"

Mr. Thomas thought a moment.

"Don't know him as you do, Lamm, but it seems to me he must have some good qualities, some little ability, to have got on such a friendly footing with the Norths."

"Do you mean the old man, or the woman?"

"Well, the family generally."

"Oh, pshaw! Paul North only wanted to 'work' him for his money, and I rather think you know that the girls may have been in with the old gentleman in his laudable endeavor."

"Perhaps you've seen and heard more about the Norths than I," he said a little uncomfortably. "But it didn't seem to me—"

"Oh, the girls? Well, they may not have had much to do but to smile sweetly on Fetridge and keep him in the firm's traces," continued the detective, with a covert glance at his ally's face;

"and, of course, this Fetridge was no fool to be caught by the bare hook. He isn't possessed of any great amount of brains, but his experience in the business world makes up for some of his natural shortcomings. However, perhaps this failure will bring out the facts about Stackhouse. I hope so. It's a bad break, and a great many people have gone down with North & Stackhouse. But I think Thornton Stackhouse himself has saved nothing out of the crash."

"The Norths have gone under, of course?"

"Yes. Not a dollar, so far as I can see, will be left to them. There's no telling, though, what those girls may have managed to pick up and hide all this while. That young creature, now, who went off—"

"You mean—Miss Stella?" There was a dangerous look in Thomas's eyes.

"Certainly. She's a hardened little baggage, I'll be bound. Why, man, she was shrewd enough to throw you off the scent, and a girl of eighteen who can trick Kingman F. Thomas when he's on the watch is an abnormally clever sort of creature."

Mr. Thomas abruptly arose and looked out of the little window.

"How do you imagine she got away from you, Kingman?" pursued Mr. Lamm.

"A piece of bad luck," the reporter returned curtly. "We all have those sort of happenings sometimes. I suppose the girl watched her chance and stole away. Nothing very calculating about that, it seems to me. It was her good fortune"

"Just so, just so," assented Mr. Lamm. "It's a sore spot with you, old fellow, eh? Well, never mind. We know now, of course, who the guilty party is in this affair. Never mind Fetridge now. Flight is confession, and you can take ample revenge by helping to bring that large-eyed maiden who gave you the slip to justice. You see the point, Kingman?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Thomas, turning upon the ingenious Mr. Lamm in great heat. "What morbid state of mind has come over you? What's the matter with you that you go on maundering like this?"

"Maundering?" Mr. Lamm's face wore a look of cleverly assumed astonishment.

"Yes. Maundering is what I said, and I meant it, too. Come! You don't mean to look me in the face and tell me that you think that a timid, shrinking girl like Stella North would ever have the courage to murder her father, even if she had the heart to do it?"

"But she ran away—"

There was a tell-tale twitching at the corners of the detective's mouth despite his efforts to the contrary, observing which Mr. Thomas gave a little start, pulled up his shirt collar, relaxed his features, laughed, though rather constrainedly, and clapped Mr. Lamm on the shoulder.

"Have done with your 'kidding,' old man," he said. "I'm not one of the Central Office crowd."

Mr. Lamm coughed behind his hand.

"You can't make me believe any of your foolishness," continued the reporter. "Now talk straight for a moment. Stackhouse or Fetridge—whom shall I watch, now?"

"No use to try to cheat you, Kingman," retorted Mr. Lamm, with an expansive smile. "Well, in the present uncertain state of affairs, both must be watched. We ought to be here, both of us, to look after matters; but I am suddenly called away and this is why I am so glad you came in."

"Called away?"

"Yes; old Jobson, the clerk at North & Stackhouse, has just told me in his innocent way all about a certain suspicious character that occasionally came to see North, and lives in New York. I am going to look the man up there, and for a day or two you must watch the Boston end for both of us."

Mr. Lamm, after advising Thomas to still watch Swampscott, and promising to bring in a man or two to help cover the city points, bade the reporter a friendly "good-by," and went from his office directly toward the Albany station.

But the protuberance on his valise, which marked the sojourning place of the very rigid hair brush which was Mr. North's constant traveling companion, soon pointed north instead of south. It was Mr. Thomas whom the detective followed. Seeing him enter the office of his newspaper, Mr. Lamm turned back, deposited his valise in his office, and betook himself to Court Square.

"Nowak, how are you?"

Thus hailed the detective a tall, well-built, well-dressed young man who was crossing the pavement at a brisk pace.

"Hallo, Lamm, how goes everything?" the reporter said.

"Quietly, quietly. How are the boys in the *Globe* office? I hardly ever see them nowadays, not even Kingman, whom I used to run across so often."

"Kingman?" said Mr. Nowak. "Oh, he's busy on the North mystery. Doesn't do anything else. Has his own time, and flits in and out of the office at all sorts of odd hours. Sometimes he's in a dozen times a day. And then, again, the editor may not see him for twenty-four hours or more. But Kingman is a privileged character, you know. He never wastes his time when he is on a job."

Mr. Lamm nodded his head emphatically. "You're right, Nowak. The word shirk is not in Kingman F. Thomas's vocabulary. You are quite positive that he has not had any other work but the North case?"

"Oh, sure. They wouldn't take him off of it under any circumstances, now, when the facts are liable to come out any hour."

"I hope he isn't wasting his time and energy. It's a queer case, isn't it?"

"Deuced queer."

With a friendly hand-grasp the two parted. Mr. Lamm proceeding to a drug store close at hand, consulted the chained directory, and found in a

minute a certain address desired. Boarding a car, he journeyed southward.

Where the streets began to show bits of garden in front of the houses, and every brick wall was not a party wall, Mr. Lamm alighted, and walked up a pleasant-looking avenue.

A new apartment house, not far from the corner, appeared to have a particular interest for John Lamm. In its neighborhood, indeed, he passed the better part of an hour. Without apparent effort, Mr. Lamm entered into an easy conversation with several people there and thereabouts, and, as a result thereof, there was a sudden transfer of especial interest from the family hotel to the building next door.

Mr. Molon's modest dwelling was by no means equal in height to its neighbor. But its graveled roof, nevertheless, offered certain facilities that the detective greatly desired. A brief colloquy was all that proved necessary to gain the desired permission.

Once upon the roof, Mr. Lamm placed himself behind a sheltering chimney, and cautiously peered into the windows of the neighboring building that overlooked the place.

All the curtains were up, and the light, streaming cheerfully into what was evidently a sitting room, brought into relief the face of a motherly-looking old lady, busied with her knitting.

Presently she looked up; and soon the sight of another face rewarded John Lamm's watch. It

was the face of a short, rather thick-set young man, whose dark-brown, kindly eyes had looked into his own not many hours before.

The detective noted them carefully as they stood talking together earnestly. He saw them turn quickly, and as the rays of the setting sun shone through the glass, another form came into full view.

It was a woman's figure.

John Lamm looked with all his eyes. There was no mistake; no room for error. It was as he thought and hoped, and a smile of absolute satisfaction played about his lips unconsciously.

Suddenly he drew back. The thick-set young man in the room opposite was just turning round. Before he could peer out of the window, in his turn, the form was out of view. When the sidelong glance was next directed outwards the blinds were drawn over the tell-tale window. But the precaution came too late. The next moment Lamm found his way down the stairs, thanked Mr. Molon behind the counter kindly for his courtesy, walked up the street, and took a car citywards.

"Ah, my black-haired friend," he thought, exultingly, "a very clever scheme of yours. But walls have eyes for John Lamm once in a while, Kingman, and though you've kept your secret well from the crowd, you couldn't conceal it from your partner. What would Applebee say, what would Stackhouse say, for that matter, if they knew that Kingman F. Thomas had a pretty guest, none other than the strangely missing Stella North?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE THING HAS A DARK LOOK.

"COME in, Kingman. You are prompt. I'm obliged to you."

Wednesday morning, and Detective Lamm at the threshold of his office was welcoming his friend the reporter.

"Yes," said Thomas, unaware of the peculiar expression with which his associate regarded him. "Your note, left at the office, seemed to be urgent."

"You are right. It was urgent. Sit down."

John Lamm locked the door and put the key in his pocket. And standing with his back against it, said, seriously:

"Thomas, I have always considered you as an excellent detective. I have changed my mind."

"Well, what now?" asked Thomas uneasily, glancing keenly at his friend, and thereafter avoiding his gaze.

"This," said Lamm, measuring his words; "the man who allows himself to be side-tracked in an important case by a pretty face and a pair of blue eyes has a cardinal weakness that sooner or later is sure to tell against him in business."

Thomas started, flushed, but controlled himself.

"Did you go clear to New York to find that out?"

"I have not been to New York," said Lamm quietly. "I have been here in Boston hard at work upon the latest and most curious feature of the North case."

"Come," said Thomas desperately, "say what you mean. Don't talk in riddles."

"I mean that I know all about it, Thomas. I know that Kingman F. Thomas, who has done in his day as excellent detective work as anybody in the State, has at last fallen into the snare of the siren, and forgotten his duty. In other words, he is in love with one of the principals. Instead of arresting her he guards her. While the police are searching everywhere for her, he has her secretly bidden in his own house right under their very noses, and comes to his best friend with a coolness that might (if he were a little less wary) have ruined his work on the case."

"John, you presume on your friendship," said Thomas hotly. He had been nervously fingering his watch charm, and alternating between white and red, throughout Lamm's quiet speech, but he now started up and faced the detective squarely. "You have no right to assume that there is any sentiment in the matter. You go too far when you charge me with letting my personal feelings run away with my sense of duty. You don't know what my object was—is."

"Ah, but pardon me, Kingman; I assume that I

do. If it had been in the ordinary course of your professional business, you would have come to me with it for advice or assistance, just as you have always done when we have associated ourselves on a case before. There is only one reason why you didn't come : you were more than afraid that I would never approve of so rash a proceeding on your part, and you were resolved upon taking the step at all hazards. In other words, Kingman, you were a little ashamed."

Thomas had regained control of himself. He drew himself up.

" See here, John Lamm, we will leave my motives out of the question, if you please. I have protected the girl. I propose to continue to do so. She was in a hard place—a harder one than you know anything about. I should have been less than a man if I had neglected to do what I did. To have given her up under the circumstances would have been the height of cruelty. You wouldn't have done it yourself. Every bit of circumstantial evidence was overwhelmingly against her. I determined to conceal her till I could discover at least proofs of her innocence sufficient to prevent her from the ignominy of an arrest. Since you have discovered the fact there is no help for it. You must aid me to keep the secret."

"Only upon one condition, Kingman. I must know all the facts."

"And, if I tell you everything, will you give me your word of honor not to use it against her or

hers?" asked Thomas, with peculiar emphasis on the second pronoun.

"But isn't that rather broad?" Lamm hesitated.

Thomas compressed his lips tightly.

"This girl has confessed everything to me, Lamm; and in return I have given her my word to do everything in my power to protect her family from disgrace. There's no way out of it. You must promise me."

"What do you mean?" demanded Lamm sternly. "Do you mean if I find that the murderer of Paul North is in her family I am to keep it to myself?"

"Decidedly not," said Thomas. "But you must have proof, not appearances."

"Oh, certainly," said Lamm. "I agree to that. Hang the appearances in a case. They are seldom right. I use appearances only to enable me to get at the facts. But once I get at the facts, Thomas, understand me, it will make no difference whose family it is in."

"Very well," said Thomas, "we understand each other. Give me your hand on it."

The two men shook hands over the compact, and sat down close together beside the detective's desk.

"In the first place," began Thomas, "it was Stella North who threw the pistol into the water at Swampscott on Sunday night and then fled from her home."

"I had guessed as much when I learned that North's shooter had been found."

"At that time I hadn't the faintest idea who the fugitive was, and when I recognized her on the Connecticut roadside I was nearly as much astonished as she was frightened. The first thing I thought was that she must be guilty. All her actions—the headlong, precipitate flight; her terror at my appearance—all seemed to wear the look of criminality. She had fainted dead away, but she soon began to come to herself again. Thereupon I tied my horse to a tree, and drew her into the woods, out of sight of passers. She was so weak and emotional I believed her ripe for a confession. Lamm, I fully expected at that moment to be rewarded for my efforts by a tremendous discovery. But I tell you, as I looked at the poor thing—hardly a woman yet—lying there on the leaves, pale, speechless, frightened nearly out of her senses, I never felt so sorry for anybody in my life."

"I know the feeling," said Lamm. "I've had it myself. But go on."

"Well, when she came to, I began to talk to her. Of course there was a scene. She broke down completely, and at her first words I understood what I ought to have had sense enough to have known from the first—that her terror was not on her own account. 'Oh, don't let them arrest her!' she kept saying. 'Don't, I beg of you! She's crazy! She must be! She never could have done it in her senses!'"

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the detective. "Sister Marion, eh?"

"'Come,' I said, 'tell me the whole story; it's the quickest way out of it. And I give you my word of honor I'll do what I can to help you.' But it was a long time before I was able to bring her to the point of trusting me. I don't know how it was exactly, but she gradually—"

"Pshaw!" said Lamm. "Don't embarrass yourself. Skip it. I know what happened as well as you do. She was in deep distress. You were in earnest. She trusted you. Good. What was her story?"

"She didn't tell me the whole story at that time," said Thomas. "I stopped her when I knew the essential facts, for I realized her danger and incidentally my own. I impressed upon her the necessity of obeying me implicitly. I told her there was but one way to save either herself or her sister, or both of them, from the ignominy of immediate arrest, and all the attendant scandal. Frightened to death almost, and shaking like a leaf, she acquiesced. I stowed her as comfortably as I could in the bottom of the carriage, and covered her with a rug. Overcome with exhaustion, she, I believe, actually slept all the way to Vernon. Outside the town I awoke her, made her get out, and told her to follow me at a distance, and to board the train that I took, but by no means to speak to me. She was veiled, and had enough money to purchase her ticket."

"Capital! You are a shrewd one, Kingman. These precautions would never had occurred to another man."

"Ah! I knew, you see, that the whole police force must be on her track by this time. As soon as she was missed from Swampscott, I knew they would be in full chase, and she, in her innocence, had left a trail as plain as the milky way."

"Of course," said Detective Lamm, significantly.

"And so," Thomas continued, "I laid my plans accordingly. We rode to Boston separately, and she followed me on foot on the other side of the street to my house. She was whiter than death when she came in; but if you know my mother yon can imagine the reception she got. Five minutes' explanation to my mother was sufficient. She opened her arms to the fugitive, and Stella North has been under her charge ever since."

"Ah! and you, of course, got the whole story from the girl?"

"That night. There is no question about her frankness or her honesty. If you could talk with with her ten minutes you would be assured of that."

"Undoubtedly. And now for the facts. What are they?"

"Well, Lamm," said Thomas, "there are two sets of facts—the immediate and the remote. Whether the remote have any relation to the immediate I cannot tell. Nevertheless, you shall hear them first. To go back to Richard Fetridge—"

"Of course," said Lamm. "Everything in the case seems to have a peculiar trick of going back to him."

"Still, I am unable to say that he has any con-

nection with this murder, Lamm. It's a mystery, old man, as you will soon see. Stella merely corroborated the facts that I have told you already about Fetridge's connection with the family. It was just as I said: he was in love with Marion, but how far they went, whether they were actually engaged or not, nobody knows; not even Stella, for the fact comes out that Marion is a very peculiar woman."

"Peculiar? Do you mean eccentric?"

"Well, eccentric, perhaps," said Thomas, doubtfully. "What I mean is that she is exceedingly self-willed and self-reliant; that she is naturally secretive, dislikes to make confidants, repels intercourse on topics near to her, dislikes to be sympathized with, and is extremely sensitive about little things that ordinary people would pass unobserved. Exaggerate all these qualities to an unusual degree and you have the traits that make Marion Stackhouse peculiar. If you call such a character eccentric, she's eccentric. If you mean, however, the eccentricity that is allied to monomania or insanity, I fail to find that she has ever exhibited any traces of it. I questioned Stella very particularly on this point—as to whether her sister was in the habit of taking queer freaks. She says it might seem so to anybody who was not familiar with her peculiar temperament, but she never knew her to do anything without the possibility of a reason therefor."

"Just my idea of her exactly," said Lamm. "Anybody who has ever looked into the restless eye

of a maniac knows what it is. I have talked with Marion Stackhouse face to face. She is no more insane than I am."

"I say this," continued Thomas, "to explain why it was that nobody knew whether Marion was really engaged to Fetridge. On account of the opposition of Mr. North, it would have been a secret, anyway, to some extent, but Stella never knew. She only knows that they were together a great deal, till one night they presumably quarreled, for his visits ceased abruptly. And the next thing Stella knew, the engagement to Stackhouse was announced."

"Wasn't this a marriage from pique, then, such as we occasionally hear of?"

"So I fancy, Lamm. Stella will not express her opinion to that effect, but I can see that she thinks so. Well, now, as to Fetridge coming back into the family again since his return from Australia, it was just as we surmised, ostensibly to pay Stella some attentions; but the girl declares that he never spoke of love to her, though he had plenty of opportunity."

"Which indicates," said Lamm quietly, "that Fetridge still came to see Marion, despite her marriage to Stackhouse."

"So it would seem; and that she regretted her hasty step in marrying too soon. Well, but this is only speculation. To go on with facts: Fetridge's attentions to Stella were thoughtlessly received—the girl insists she has no other feeling for him

than that of a pleasant acquaintance—but after his departure on his recent business trip, the purpose of which we can't determine, it came to her ears that there was a great deal of gossip about their association. She determined to be more careful in the future. The day before the murder, Fetridge reappeared at the house. It would seem that the instant he got home he came to the North household. He began to lay out plans at once to go hither and yon with the girl. But the poor thing's suspicions were aroused by her long month of reflection. She determined not to be made a catspaw of for any purpose, and at the first opportunity—having summoned up the necessary courage—she broached the tabooed subject to her sister."

"What time of day was this?"

"It seems to have been about the middle of the afternoon. Marion was not feeling very well. She was lying down, and Stella was sitting beside her with a fan. Marion introduced Fetridge's name herself, making some inquiries about his visit of the previous evening. Then Stella made so bold as to ask her advice, and finally told what her suspicions were."

"But you don't mean—"

"Simply that Fetridge pretended to pay attentions to her (Stella) for the sake of appearances, and that his real object was to be near Marion."

"Whew! Knowing the woman, I can imagine the result."

"Easily. But Stella was innocent enough. She

merely intended to give her sister a well-meant warning. Marion received it as an insult. 'It is a jealous lie,' she cries into the ears of the astonished Stella. 'Richard Fetridge never meant to marry me; never cared a feather for me. If you had asked me I could have told you so. But since you thought it better to play the spy on me, why, I'll prove it to you.' And with a great emphasis on the word prove, she dashed out of the room."

"This woman is curious. No doubt about it. But her conscience troubles her, and she's jealous of Fetridge. There's no other explanation of this line of conduct."

"Ah, well," said Thomas doubtfully, "if Marion had married Stackhouse purely from pique, and had been carrying on the hollow mockery for a whole year, because she was too proud to betray what she suffered to any living soul, it seems that there might be enough inflammable material in her emotional nature to get up a good blaze at the first spark. Don't you think so?"

"Quite likely. It's logically put, anyhow. But about these proofs that Fetridge didn't care for her. I am anxious to know the nature of them."

"So am I; but unfortunately they disappear from my story with this reference to them. Stella naturally supposed Marion went upstairs to get something. Imagine her surprise, five minutes later, to see her driving off in a carriage. In a short time the coachman came back. Mrs. Stackhouse, he said, had gone to Boston. Stella began to be ex-

ceedingly alarmed. What in the world could have occasioned this sudden freak she could not imagine. That her sister was terribly angry she saw, and the insane idea that perhaps she intended to tell Richard Fetridge what had been said drove the poor girl quite distracted. She followed Marion to the city in the next train, and searched everywhere for her. It was after six when she arrived, and all the places of business were closed. This circumstance only increased the girl's alarm. She began to have what she calls a presentiment of evil. There were three places in town where she thought her sister might be—the houses of three friends. One of them was a way out in Roxbury. She made the rounds, exciting everywhere wonder and concern; but she abruptly refused all offers of escort. It was getting later and later all the time. Already it was dark, and the street lights were burning. Suddenly she remembered that Marion had the keys to the house in Marlboro Street. There was a bare possibility that she had gone there in quest of the proofs she had so mysteriously mentioned. Stella set herself in that direction. It must have been about half-past nine o'clock when she approached the place, and saw—what do you think? Marion Stackhouse coming down the steps!"

The imperturbable John Lamm for once lost his professional *sang froid*. He sprang to his feet, and brought his hand down with a crash upon the top of his desk.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "And all this time you have been concealing this from me!"

CHAPTER XVI.

CONSPIRACY!

"IT is significant to you, then?" Thomas asked, uneasily, with a faint smile.

"Oh, certainly not," returned John Lamm, sarcastically. "It doesn't mean anything. But don't delay. How did Marion act? What did she have to say for herself?"

The detective, instead of resuming his seat, began to walk about the room with his hands behind him.

"She hadn't anything to say for herself," returned Thomas. "That's just the trouble. She acted queer—queerer than Stella had ever seen her act in her life."

"How queer?"

"As the girl expresses it, she seemed like a person walking in her sleep. She spoke to Stella but in a mechanical way, as if her mind were quite elsewhere all the time. They went back to the depot and rode out to Swampscott together."

"Do you mean to say that Marion expressed no surprise when she saw Stella in the street?"

"Momentarily she seemed aroused, but as soon as Stella began to account for herself she relapsed into her 'frozen' condition again."

"What a woman she is!"

"She was not strong enough to conceal from her sister that something terrible had happened. She was so dazed and unnatural that the young girl was frantic with apprehension."

"Of course this places it beyond a doubt that Marion had either killed her legal father or had seen him killed."

"But, my dear Lamm, I can't entertain the first idea for a minute. What possible motive could there be for her?"

"It is to be determined simply by the fact of whether the girl was alone in the house that night."

"Ah, precisely. That is what I am working to find out. Well, Lamm, on the whole journey home, Marion Stackhouse had but two sentences to utter which seem to have any bearing upon the case. The first was when Stella made some mention of Stackhouse. 'Never speak to me of that man again,' said Marion fiercely. 'He is not my husband.' And again, just before they got to the house, seizing her sister's wrist, 'Stella,' she whispered, 'do you want to see me in my grave? Then never tell a living soul where I have been.'"

"Thunder and guns!" ejaculated Lamm. "That woman is the princess of mysteries. Doesn't it strike you a little peculiar that she should continue to assert that Stackhouse is not her husband? Mind you, she always puts it in that way. I have heard her say it myself. 'He is not my husband.' Now why shouldn't she say, 'I refuse to live with

this man any longer,' not for ever, ' He is not my husband.' Wasn't the marriage public ? "

" To be sure it was. The marriage occurred in St. Paul's Church, in the presence of hundreds of people."

Lamm came and placed his hand softly on the reporter's shoulder.

" You don't imagine, Thomas," he questioned below his breath, " that she has been secretly married to this man Fetridge previous to his departure for Australia ? "

" What an idea! " cried Thomas, amused. " You seem anxious to give her a monomania on the marriage question. If married already to Fetridge what earthly reason could induce her to marry Stackhouse ? It seems to me that you have got a complication there not likely to arise in any well-regulated family."

" Perhaps. But I've gone far enough in this case to know that there is something different behind it than anything I ever met with in all my life before. But to go on. Of course Stella is frightened to death by Marion's reference to the grave, and refrained from telling anybody where she had seen her, until you got it out of her."

" So you might know by the way things have gone on. She was scared enough that night, you may be sure, but the next day when the news came of the murder you can imagine the effect. There seems to have been a great scene between the sisters. Stella came out horrified at Marion's

calmness. Marion would tell her absolutely nothing except such enigmatical sentences as these: 'I am not responsible. The affair is out of my hands. Justice will overtake the guilty. Let me alone. If you betray me I shall kill myself. You surely do not believe me capable for any cause of killing a man who has taken the place of my own father. I loved Father North, as well as you did. I could not have harmed him if I had hated him'—all of which was scarcely calculated to appease Stella's agony of apprehension. It was not, however, till the young girl discovered that her sister was sleeping with her father's pistol under her pillow that she quite lost her head, and believed that Marion wes really guilty."

"What! The weapon that killed Paul North?" asked the detective, almost helpless with amazement.

"Presumably, since she must have brought it with her from the Marlboro Street house the night of the murder, and one of its barrels had been recently discharged."

"What a nerve that woman has!" murmured the detective. "And how in the world did Stella make the discovery?"

"I'll tell you, Lamm. It was in the middle of the night on Saturday. The body of the murdered man had been brought home, and it lay in the hall below stairs ready for the funeral. You can imagine the effect on this young girl, who is of an affectionate disposition, and whose life up to this

time had been one merry smile. Everything goes to show that she was the petted darling of her father. Of course, however fond and proud anybody might have been of Marion, she was scarcely the person to be made a pet of. And with this awful cloud of horror and suspicion weighing upon her, Stella could not sleep. The ghost of the poisoned King of Denmark was no more real to Hamlet than was the spirit of her father, threatening with awful finger the perpetrators of his woful murder, to this young girl. Her fears for Marion under the weight of the night became absolutely appalling. Though not what is called a religious girl, Stella could no longer trust to any earthly aid. She resolved to go and pray by Marion's bedside."

"Natural enough in this eighteen-year-old girl," commented the detective.

"It was the last effort, you understand, to obtain contrition from the woman who had been impervious to the most piteous appeals, the most solemn entreaties. The poor girl went and found her sister's door unlocked. She approached the bedside. It seems that Marion was asleep, but her sleep was light; her dreams perhaps troubled, for she sprang up suddenly with an awful cry and grasped Stella by the shoulders, demanding in a tone that nearly frightened her sister out of her senses, 'What do you want? What do you want?' She shook her so that Stella made a frantic effort to get away. In the struggle the pillow was dragged from the

bed and something beneath it fell with a crash. Marion by this time awoke to a realization of her surroundings. She sprang out of bed with a haste that could not escape Stella's observation, and picked up the something which had fallen. 'What is it?' demands the startled Stella. 'Nothing,' replies Marion. 'What is the matter, dear?' 'Go back to your bed and I will come to you.' But no. Affairs had reached a climax now where suspicion must either be allayed or confirmed. Marion was confused and dismayed by the sudden transformation in her sister, and before she could regain control of herself the hand of the younger girl came in contact with the cold steel. 'It is father's pistol,' whispered Stella, in what state of mind you may imagine. 'Don't deny it, Marion: you have been sleeping with it under your pillow.' 'I wont deny it,' said Marion, considerably disturbed. 'But why will you insanely insist upon knowing things which it would be better for your peace of mind to remain ignorant of?'"

"And all this time it was quite dark in the room!" Lamm asked.

"Absolutely. Stella's conclusion that Marion held her father's pistol was one of those intuitive leaps at correct conclusions that are peculiar to women. And thereupon, almost crazy with terror, Stella cries out, 'You killed him, Marion! It was your own hand.' Of course, the moment the words were out of her lips she was penitent for having uttered them. 'Stella,' says Marion, tremblingly,

'your mad suspicions are indiscreet. Do you suppose I could sleep in this house where the man who has given me all that I possess except life is lying dead, if the guilt of his death were at my door? And are you the same girl who used to cuddle down in my arms in the old days and tell me that you loved me better than any one in the world except papa? Tell me, do you remember what I owe to this man who was more than a father to me? Have you forgotten who it was that nursed him in his last illness because he couldn't bear to have a hired nurse profane him with unsympathetic hands? Can you recall ever in my life a single expression of ingratitude—'"

"Bosh!" interrupted the detective, "That is all very well for Stella, but for me it is necessary to be told how she became possessed of that pistol which was supposed to be locked in Paul North's desk in Marlboro Street."

"Unfortunately," returned Thomas uneasily, "she neither explained nor apologized for her conduct. You know what women are. Stella's heart, which is not located far from the surface, was touched. She began to cry and to plead for forgiveness. And then Marion forgave her; but just as soon as Stella began to beg for an explanation the woman said to her very coldly, 'Go to your aunt, dear. What you want is somebody to dry your tears and soothe you. I am no comforter in a time like this, and I certainly shall not tell you things which would only add to your worry and

distress.' And she did go to her aunt; not to make a confidante of her, but to beg for consolation and sympathy."

"And this scene between the girls ended in nothing, then?"

"It ended just as I have told you. But Stella, though she tried her best, could not repress her anxiety. She was unable to bear the strain of such a position. She constantly saw before her eyes the spectacle of the officers entering the house and dragging Marion off to prison. In view of all these facts, is there anything strange in her eventual action? The funeral was scarcely over, and the family returned to the house, when she hastened to Marion's room, took the revolver, and fled —a headlong, terror-stricken flight. Her first idea was to put the evidence of Marion's guilt out of sight. She threw it into the water, little thinking that I was watching her. She says that she had no clear idea what she was doing, or where she was going; but she had determined never to go back to the house. She felt that she could never face her sister again. In the train to Boston she bethought herself of some friends in Hartford, where she had often visited, and had always been welcome. For that city she therefore set out, only to find that the house was closed, and her friends gone to the beach for the summer. By this time she was almost crazy from fright, lack of sleep and food, for she had been able neither to eat nor rest since the news of the murder. Heaven knows what would

have become of her if accident had not put me upon her trail! Such is the story of Stella North; and in view of it, John Lamm, I want to know if you blame me for what I have done?"

"I blame you for only one thing, Thomas," said Lamm earnestly; "and that was for being afraid to trust me with your secret."

"How did I know in what light you would view it?" returned the reporter, uneasily. "You are always so matter-of-fact and business-like. And, of course, I am perfectly aware that my present position is quite the reverse of business-like."

"Hang the position!" exclaimed John Lamm. "That's your affair. It's the inwardness of the North case that I'm looking after, and your story has given me a wonderful push ahead."

The detective took out his note-book, disfigured with his peculiar hieroglyphics, and began at once making additions, corrections, and reflections, quite as if the problem before him had been one in mathematics, and could be approved by applying some of the advanced rules of the higher arithmetic.

"Well," said Thomas, after he had watched him in silence for some minutes, "what is your theory?"

"None, Thomas," returned the detective quickly. "What is yours?"

"That Marion is trying to shield somebody from the results of a capital offense."

"And that somebody is?"

"Either Fetridge or Stackhouse."

"With a leaning toward—"

"Fetridge," said Thomas. "But I should like to know which of the men went to the house that night, if either—before expressing any deep conviction."

"Ah, quite so. And that I propose to ascertain. But go on, Kingman. Your conclusions are always logical, and they interest me for that reason. There is no crime without a motive. What was the motive?"

"My dear fellow," said Thomas, "that is just the mistake made by criminal theorists. But you and I know that the majority of murders are done without adequate motives. Few men in these days plot to kill. They kill when they are insane with rum or jealousy, or to defend themselves."

"You emphasize that, I see!"

"Because I have thought it right along," said the reporter. "The fact that the bullet must have been fired from a point lower down than an erect man naturally carries his hand leads me to believe that the murderer of Paul North was on his knees; and it is logical to presume from that that he had been knocked down."

"Clever!" said John Lamm, with genuine admiration. "Clever, and just like you, Thomas. Of course we can think of hundreds of reasons why North might have knocked down his partner, whose advice had ruined him—for North was steady enough before he came under Stackhouse's influ-

ence—or why he should have knocked down an importunate gentleman who might have been trying to deceive his daughter."

"Precisely," agreed Thomas.

"And then," said Lamm slowly, "you throw the idea of a most deliberate and cunningly-laid conspiracy of murder for security and revenge out of the question."

"Conspiracy?" echoed Thomas.

"Conspiracy!" said John Lamm.

Thomas looked like a doubtful man who would be very glad to become convinced.

"Yes," said John Lamm in a tone of deep conviction. "I am willing to stake my professional reputation at this stage of the case on the prediction that this murder of North is a conspiracy—either for ruining Stackhouse or for revenge upon Paul North."

"And—the girl is in it?" murmured Thomas, apprehensively.

"Certainly, the girl is in it. To be sure the girl is in it. You can't alter that fact to save your life. For good, bad, or indifferent purposes—Marion Stackhouse planned the game. Whose hand carried it out I wont say at this time; but I am convinced of one thing—it originated in her mind."

"Why, John Lamm? Why?" demanded Thomas, aghast.

"Because I always look to the character of the person to correspond to the nature of the crime. There is nobody else in this little coterie capable

of originating a crime, so cunningly conceived, so admirably executed."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean!" asked the detective. "Good heavens, Thomas, where are your eyes? Can't you see that in every step we have taken we have been baffled, misled, made fools of? Do you imagine Paul North would have gone to his town house, shut up as it was for the summer, unless he had been enticed there? The writing of Stackhouse's name on the wall proves conclusively to my mind that Stackhouse did not do it. Why, how absurd it is! The medical examiner gives 180 seconds as a limit to North's life after he was shot. Do you suppose if Stackhouse had shot him he would have run away before assuring himself that he was dead? Would he have let North write his name on the wall? If North had done it, wouldn't he have smeared it out again? Why, of course he would. And in this name upon the wall is the animus of the whole matter. There we see the fangs and the teeth of the serpent. The bitter, deadly emnity that underlies the whole scheme. That the entire object was revenge upon Stackhouse I do not believe. It is too roundabout and too dangerous a method of revenge; but that the perpetrators of the deed hated that man—why, the fact is as clear as sunlight. Now, who hates Stackhouse? Who on the day of the discovery of the crime drove him from her side, from the house, knowing full well, nay, triumphantly welcoming the

fact in so many words—that such an act would only deepen the suspicion about him? Who, with Paul North alive, was not free to meet the man she really loved; and who, Paul North dead, and Stackhouse out of the way, might reunite herself with her guilty lover? Who, for no cause but one that under such circumstances we can understand, flies into a passion of anger at the remonstrance of an innocent girl, and is so excited by the impending crime that she cannot keep herself away from the scene?"

"Stop! Don't go on!"

Thomas had risen and was holding up his hand. There was something horrible even to this veteran in the merciless arraignment of the sister of the woman he had protected. It might be true. John Lamm was the shrewdest of shrewd men; but he would not believe it until he had all the proofs before him.

"I tell you, Lamm," he declared, "I will not believe that woman planned that murder as long as there is a chance in the world for a reasonable doubt. And I can show—"

There was a rattle at the door-handle.

"It's my man, Bill," said the detective, "back again from Swampscott."

He unlocked the door.

"And what has her ladyship to offer to-day?"

"This."

The messenger placed a letter in John Lamm's hand. The detective broke the seal and read it

eagerly. "See," he said, passing it to Thomas, "it's from my little parlor maid at Swampscott."

The reporter perused the missive in his turn. With a little editing it would have read as follows:

"She is getting worse and worse. If this goes on much longer I can't stay here. Since Stella ran away she's acted stranger than ever. It wouldn't do to speak to her for your life. Mr. Fetridge called last night again. Their talk was short. She got a letter from her husband last night. I brought it from the post-office, and know his S's. She spent all the evening, I think, writing, for her room was full of tiny scraps, written on, this morning; but she must have torn them all up, for no letter has been posted from this house; that's certain. I'm crazy to know if that poor girl has been heard from. Don't keep the news from me, as soon as she is found. I think Stella's going has scared M. She looks like a ghost, and I'm afraid of her, and so are all the rest."

"It's evident she tried to answer the letter Stackhouse wrote her," said Thomas. "Something must have thrown her into an unusual state of indecision." John Lamm's comments were entirely mental. He only remarked that he had a deal of work before him. Before setting out, however, on his new quests, the detective took a decided notion that he wanted to be introduced to Stella, with whom he had never been given an opportunity to talk. Thomas was delighted at the

chance of converting his friend wholly to the cause of the unfortunate girl, as he was sure a visit to her would do. So the two men were soon in the horse-cars, on their way to the reporter's home.

Thomas led Lamm to a little room in the second story, where his mother—a delightful lady with a sweet voice and a face a little faded and worn with the cares of fifty years, but brimming full of good will and sympathy of a heart that the years had failed to harden—is seated at her knitting. The old lady takes off her spectacles, and is delighted to meet any friend of her son, whom it is easy to see she has placed in a niche far above the ordinary walks of mankind. She drops a little courtesy, and when her son whispers in her ear, becomes brimful of importance and mystery. Going to the door of the adjoining chamber—her own room—she says something in a low voice. There is a rustle of a woman's dress, and Stella North appears on the threshold. Pale and haunted by a cruel fear such as never troubled her young life before, she is, nevertheless, so much her old self that her eyes seem ready to laugh again, and the dimples to indent themselves in her pretty cheeks, if sufficient encouragement is given for her roguish smile. Alas, poor child! Her accustomed mirth had been a stranger to her for some time; and the laughing face that nature had given her was only a cruel mockery. It was useless for John Lamm to ask himself whether she were part and parcel of the murderous conspiracy which he suspected.

The refutation of all doubt was written in her clear blue eyes, her timid shrinking from a stranger, her honest, roguish face.

Why, that girl was meant for the open air and the sunshine, to sing, to love, to be happy, he thought. It is an incongruous hardship that a tragedy like this should come into her life. She is as out of place as a gay soubrette in the family of Lady Macbeth!

But when she spoke, when, encouraged by the ready tact of Thomas, she was led to take part in the pleasant conversation that ensued—Thomas had expressly stipulated that no reference should be made to the tragedy—why, then John Lamm could not restrain his honest admiration and his cordial sympathy. A creature at once so frank, so free, so shy and so bold, so modest and so reckless, in a breath, was enough to disarm the most severe of critics. And the detective pronounced her the beau ideal of an innocent, mischievous, light-hearted girl, not too shallow to love, but altogether too sunny to hate.

But, more than all, he noted the half-abashed, half-reverential air with which she regarded her guardian Thomas; and the peculiar solicitous, respectful, and protecting manner which he exhibited toward her.

"Well, well," sighed Lamm, as he walked away, "there is one outcome to the North case which I feel perfectly safe in predicting at the present time. These two people are in love. A curious

match! To think that Thomas should meet his fate under such circumstances! Well, well! I wish I felt so sure of the rest as I do of them!"

And John Lamm hastened back to resume the dropped thread of the case which was intensifying in interest with every hour of investigation.

"If I am right," he muttered, "I shall soon find that Richard Fetridge and that curious woman were in that house together."

He went direct to his inner office and sat down at his desk.

CHAPTER XVII.

FETRIDGE IS STILL RETICENT.

MR. LAMM had hardly got comfortably settled in his chair, and was meditating a look over the Public Statues to freshen his memory on a certain point, when his familiar announced that Mr. Thornton Stackhouse was in waiting.

The broker showed in his care-furrowed face something of the effect of the strain he had been under; but until he was alone with the detective he maintained much of his accustomed decision of manner. Then he made no further effort to conceal his anxiety.

"Mr. Lamm," he said, eagerly bending over the table and tapping it with nervous fingers, "this strain is becoming greater than I can endure, and I want your best advice what to do."

"You may command me," was the response, given in by no means an unfriendly tone. "But sit down, sit down, and talk about the matter calmly."

"Calmly!" Stackhouse smiled bitterly. "You do not know what I have to suffer, man. The failure is bad enough; the distrust of me I see on every hand is hard to endure; but I could stand

up against everything if I did not have trouble at home."

There was a break in the man's tone, but he controlled himself in a moment, though he studiously avoided meeting Mr. Lamm's steadfast look.

"My wife and I have had serious trouble. I cannot live here under all these burdens."

"Women are odd sometimes," said Lamm, "but almost all of them have some weak spot through acquaintance with which they may be managed. It ought to be possible to effect a reconciliation with your wife. Excuse me for speaking thus plainly, Mr. Stackhouse."

"You know neither the woman nor the cause of the trouble," returned Stackhouse hurriedly. "However, this was not the subject I came here to discuss."

"How can I assist you, Mr. Stackhouse? Command me."

"Mr. Lamm, I have every reason to believe that my steps are dogged: that all my actions are spied upon. If I go in the streets after dark, there is a man always just at my elbow. If I make any sudden movement in the daytime, somebody starts into life in an unexpected quarter, and is directly upon my heels. This morning I opened a letter. As I stood still to read it, I became aware that a face was peering over my shoulder. I turned suddenly, but the man was quite as quick, and passed on without looking at me. But I was well aware that

I did not now see him for the first time. All of which leads me to believe that I am watched."

"A logical conclusion, Mr. Stackhouse."

"Well, then," said Stackhouse nervously, "what I came to ask you was this: Suppose I wanted to do so, what do you think of the possibility of my getting quietly out of town?"

The detective's warning finger was uplifted in an instant.

"Don't go," pronounced Mr. Lamm, decisively. "By no means try to leave Boston."

"You mean it would be of no use for me to try," rejoined Stackhouse dejectedly. "I know I am being dogged constantly, but with your help, I thought—"

"There would be no trouble in giving the slip to the men who follow you about," said Mr. Lamm. "You could get away from Boston easily enough. But you would be stopped by telegraph before you had gone forty miles. Come, Mr. Stackhouse, give up the idea of flight. It isn't like you to think of it. Stay here and fight your trouble out, man fashion, saying nothing, keeping quietly about your business. You must not embarrass me, for one thing. I am running down the guilty party, I verily believe."

Stackhouse rose, clutching the table with both hands.

"You mean it?" he said hoarsely.

Mr. Lamm nodded with perfect assurance.

"I do mean it, Mr. Stackhouse. Now you have

retained me in this case, don't spoil my work by an attempt to run away. It would not only have a very bad appearance, but sadly interfere with my plans. Stand firm. I know you are having a great deal to contend with ; but it will only make matters worse to—well, suppose we say change your base of operations. Come! Promise me that you'll quietly stay here in Boston until, at least, the North case ceases to be a mystery."

The detective's hand was stretched out as he spoke, and soon encircled Mr. Stackhouse's palm. The warm grip seemed to put new courage into the man, and as he thanked Mr. Lamm and went out, he seemed more like the junior partner of North & Stackhouse, in their most flourishing days, than he had been for many a day.

Mr. Lamm listened to the retreating footstep, and felicited himself in having done at least one piece of good work.

"I can't conscientiously say," he remarked to his reflection in the looking-glass, "that I enjoy being retained by quite so many people in one case. Before this time I expected to be able to resign from one or the other ; but I don't seem to be quite able to make up my mind. What with Kingman's *protégée* and this luckless man Stackhouse, I have quite enough to occupy my mind and thought. But now for that Apollo whom I suspect."

Mr. Richard Fetridge was found in his quiet little office in anything but a reposeful state of mind, and his books and papers were in great disorder.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lamm," said Mr. Fetridge. "Excuse the looks of the room, and find a chair for yourself, if you can. I've just been clearing up my Nicaragua Midland account. A tidy sum I've dropped into that swindle. It's not the money I care about, but the being taken in so shamefully. North & Stackhouse, indeed! A nice mess that rascally junior partner has made of it."

Mr. Lamm acquiesced in look, but not in words, and then began to question his companion about the details of the failure and its extent.

"The creditors wont get ten cents on a dollar, sir."

Richard Fetridge had repeated these words with much emphasis, when a little dried-up clerk, who had been holding an animated conversation in an undertone with some one in the passage, came up with an apologetic air.

"Well, what's the matter, Olsen?" queried Fetridge, rather irritably.

"Man at the door," answered the clerk. "Wont go away. Says he must see you. Very important business."

"What sort of looking man?" asked the employer.

"Rather disreputable, sir. Been drinking, should say, but seems really to have business."

As if by way of emphasizing unmistakably Mr. Olsen's half-whispered words, an unkempt head, with watery eyes, peered in through the doorway.

Mr. Lamm looked at him with mild curiosity, while Mr. Fetridge gave a start of recognition.

"Good-day, sir," said a shambling figure that little by little gained a foothold within the room. "Mr. Fetridge, good-day, sir. I hope you are well, sir."

Without awaiting an answer to these salutations, delivered in rather a thick voice, Mr. Fetridge motioned the clerk aside, and said to the detective under his breath—

"Just go into the inside office yonder a moment. I suppose I must see this fellow; but I'll not be long."

Inwardly wondering, Mr. Lamm suffered himself to be introduced into a little room with a window opening out upon a wall, and furnished with two chairs, a deal table, and several rows of shelves occupied by dusty books.

There was a fan-light over the door that gave access to the larger office. Thus much the detective knew at first glance.

"I must use that fan-light," he said to himself. "This proceeding of Fetridge is very curious. It may be only one of his whims—he's a notional man, I can see. But at any rate, it will do no harm to watch the interview. What can a well-to-do man like Fetridge have in common with a fellow like that?"

As Mr. Lamm asked himself the question he noiselessly brought a chair to the door, and followed that proceeding with an equally silent transfer of

several books. By the aid of this device the detective found himself able to look through the fan-light unobserved, and soon realized that he could hear as well as see.

The unkempt head was unpleasantly near Mr. Fetridge, as Mr. Lamm looked in, and the expression of disgust on Mr. Fetridge's countenance left no room to doubt that he fully realized the fact.

"I wan' ten doll'rs, an' I wan' it now," remarked the caller, thickly, but emphatically.

"What do you mean?" returned Fetridge, drawing away his arm. "Didn't you promise, on your honor, when I gave you the money last time that you wouldn't trouble me again?"

There was a cunning look in the bleared, red eyes.

"I was half full and don' remember what I said," he rejoined. "Don' care, anyway. I wan' that ten doll'rs, and I must have it!"

The visitor shook his trembling hand at Fetridge with an apology for a threat. Mr. Lamm, rather surprised, noticed that the business man did not openly resent his companion's tone, but stood there, evidently in much perplexity of mind.

"Come," continued the tramp in louder tones. "You can't frighten me! I know where you were that night—don't forget that!"

Mr. Fetridge wheeled his importunate caller around and said, in apprehensive warning—

"Hush! Don't speak so loud! There are people within hearing!"

"Hand over, then," answered the man sullenly,

"and make no more bones about the matter, either!"

As if fearful of some interruption, Fetridge put some money between the grimy fingers of his creditor and fairly pushed him out of the room amid some mutterings which the watcher at the fan-light could not overhear.

Mr. Lamm had restored the books to the shelves and was sitting down, looking out into the well, when Fetridge opened the door of the little office.

"Come in," he said; "I've got rid of the fellow; used to be a gardener on my place at Swampscott, and I put up with his visits because he is really a capable man when not in liquor."

John Lamm looked Richard Fetridge full in the face.

"When I am in a gentleman's employ," he began, "I do not feel that I have done my full duty as confidential detective if I do not warn him when he is treading on dangerous ground."

Richard Fetridge grew a little red in the face.

"What do you mean?" he asked, constrainedly.

"I mean that when a gentleman situated as you are pays blackmail to a man who looks like a dirty tramp—"

Mr. Fetridge turned upon him hotly.

"This is going too far, Mr. Lamm; altogether too far. It is none of your business."

"Pardon me," answered the detective very unperturbably. "Under the circumstances, Mr. Fetridge, it is my business to warn you, very emphati-

cally, that your giving money to this man here, just now, was a very ticklish and dangerous proceeding. You may ask how I know."

"I do ask how you know," put in Mr. Fetridge, with anger and shame contending for the mastery.

"It was dangerous, Mr. Fetridge, because you are one of the parties under surveillance in this matter of the murder of Paul North."

"What?"

"Don't get excited, sir. I am simply stating facts. You were the last person seen with Paul North, so far as the evidence in hand indicates. Consequently, until more is known about this phase of the case, you are under suspicion, to a certain extent. Whether you know it or not, sir, you have been watched almost constantly."

"Watched!" ejaculated Fetridge, now very pale.

"Watched. By the police," pursued Mr. Lamm. "Now I have been frank with you, and you must be equally frank with me. How do you imagine my services as confidential detective can be of value to you, Mr. Fetridge, if you do not give me your entire confidence?"

There was some answer on Mr. Fetridge's lips, but he could not seem to give it utterance.

Mr. Lamm pursued his advantage steadily.

"Let me ask you one question. You paid blackmail to that man because he knew that you had an interview with Paul North at his house the night of the murder. Am I not right?"

Fetridge started up.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, "but you misapprehend the state of the case, Mr. Lamm. I did not pay the man because I feared to have the truth known on my account. I have kept silent on the subject simply out of respect for the feelings of Mr. North's family."

Somewhat enigmatical and unsatisfactory Mr. Lamm thought this statement. But he made no comment, and continued his questioning.

"If this is not a case of blackmail, Mr. Fetridge, why did you pay this man money? Do you mean to say you were not at Paul North's house that night?"

Mr. Fetridge by this time had regained his composure.

"I have no hesitation in saying to you that I was at his house that night," he answered.

The detective's face grew dark.

"Why did you not tell me this? Why did you not make the fact known to the police?"

"For the simple reason that the police have not asked me."

Mr. Lamm took an impatient step or two around the room.

"Mr. Fetridge, you are an enigma," he resumed, rather sharply. "Perhaps you will be good enough to explain why you permitted the public to have the impression that you parted with Paul North for the last time the afternoon before the murder at the Old State House?"

"I had no idea or suspicion that Mr. North had

been put out of the way when I made that statement at the directors' meeting," Mr. Fetridge explained. "Besides, Stackhouse was there. I would not have let him know of my private conference with Mr. North for a great deal. And since the crime came out, I have been living in hope that you would discover the facts in season for me to keep out of any possible connection with the affair. I should have told you about it; I realize it now. But what's past is past."

Mr. Fetridge sat down resignedly.

"Why did you go to Mr. North's that evening?" Mr. Lamm questioned, now quite unmoved, so far as outward appearance was concerned.

"To discuss a business matter."

"A queer place!" Mr. Lamm spoke in a significant tone.

"You think so? Yet I had peculiar reasons, and I accounted them weighty reasons, for meeting Mr. North at his house. My business was confidential, and could not be done at the office or in any place so well as at the house in Marlboro Street."

"Mr. North's partner was not a party to the business in hand?"

Fetridge's eyes flashed angrily.

"It would have been well if he had not been a party to any of North & Stackhouse's business," he said, with some bitterness of tone. "But this was a special matter. How important it was you may judge from this fact—that if Stackhouse had found

out that North was possessed of the information I gave him, and did not know that I knew it also, he would have had an ample motive for committing the crime of which I believe him guilty."

Mr. Lamm looked at him curiously.

"And you still wish to keep the subject of your last conversation a secret, even from me?"

"Even from you," responded Fetridge obstinately. "I must await developments, and I hope those developments will preclude the necessity of my speaking about the matter at all."

"Bear in mind what I said to you just now about surveillance." Mr. Lamm spoke gravely. "You are liable to arrest at any time."

Fetridge gave an incredulous laugh.

"I don't think they'll arrest me," Fetridge answered lightly. Then, in a more serious tone, "One thing I'll tell you, Mr. Lamm. To the best of my knowledge and belief Stackhouse was in Paul North's house that night."

"Something more than knowledge and belief is requisite—evidence," responded Mr. Lamm, rather drily. "There's much in this whole business that concerns you closely—more closely, perhaps, than you think. At what time did you leave Paul North's house in Marlboro Street that night?"

"Between half-past eight and a quarter to nine."

"Was there any one in the street or near by, so far as you know?"

"No one. But I had not gone far when this

fellow who was here just now touched me on the shoulder. I turned round and recognized him."

"Oho! You know him, then?"

"Why, yes. He used to be head clerk in North & Stackhouse's office: got to speculating; was pinched in Nicaragua Midland; lost his little all; took to drink and so forth. I pitied the fellow, knowing how he came to be down in the world, and occasionally gave him a little to help him along."

"He wanted money that night, of course?"

"Of course. I didn't fancy his having met me at such a time and place, and as I handed him the five-dollar note I bade him not mention having seen me. He readily agreed, and then started off in a hurry. To meet some one round the corner, I suppose." And Mr. Fetridge sighed.

Mr. Lamm pursed his lips together. "And since then the fellow has been hunting you for more money."

"That's about the state of the case," answered Fetridge, rather reluctantly. "You understand, I thought it was cheaper to buy the man's silence, being sure that a few days would clear up the whole matter."

The detective shook his head. "Very risky business, sir. But never mind that now. A few moments ago you said something about believing Stackhouse had been at North's house that night. Why?"

"Why?" returned Fetridge. "The outer door—the storm door—was unlocked when we came there.

Mr. North himself called my attention to the fact. 'Hullo,' he said, 'Thornton is here probably.' I knew it would never do to have that man overhear our conversation, and we searched the house high and low. Finally I was convinced that, though Stackhouse may have been there, he had gone away again. The idea that he might come back that night never entered my head. But I have no doubt whatever now that he did come back, and that Thornton Stackhouse was the last person who saw Paul North alive."

"Indeed! Well then, Mr. Fetridge, I must request a reply to a question I asked you once before. What connection has this Creole woman, Marie Moissot, with the case?"

Fetridge started.

"You told me once, I believe, that the medical examiner says that the murder was committed in the first part of the evening?"

"I did, sir."

"Thank you. I wanted to be sure.'

"But what has this to do with the Creole?" Lamm asked with some impatience.

"Oh," returned Fetridge, with an unsuccessful assumption of carelessness, "I forgot. Excuse me. My mind wandered from the subject. The Creole woman? She has no connection with the murder. That is quite impossible."

"Then once more I ask you, plainly, who is she?"

"Well, then, plainly, sir, I will answer you. She

was a foolish girl who believed too readily in Stackhouse. He parted from her and went on, and she, I suppose, had to suffer for her credulity. But this was ten years ago, and he has doubtless forgotten her."

"Ah! Well, this brings me to another question. How comes Marion Stackhouse to know of the existence of this woman?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Fetridge excitedly. "She does not, does she?"

"I think she does," said Lamm dreamily. "But passing that, since you do not know, we come to question No. 2. Why does Marion Stackhouse refuse to live with her husband since the murder?"

Fetridge flushed.

"You will persist, Mr. Lamm, for some strange reason, in assuming me to be in Mrs. Stackhouse's confidence."

"I know that you are a friend of the family," said the detective calmly.

"Very well," said Fetridge, "I give you my word of honor that I am not in that lady's confidence. I have urged her to tell me her reasons. She declines to do it. I can only guess at them. Her conduct is significant enough to me that she has by some means become possessed of evidence against her husband. But what wife would acknowledge such a fact?"

"Ah!" was Mr. Lamm's only reply to this interrogatory. Neither Mr. Fetridge nor anybody else would be likely to gain much information from this

characteristic grunt, which was even more than non-committal.

"By the way," said Mr. Lamm, as he rose to go, "I suppose I ought to tell you that press of other business is liable to cause me to drop your work at short notice, Mr. Fetridge. I had no idea, when I took the case, that it would last so long."

"I hope not," said Fetridge earnestly.

"I hope not, too," returned Mr. Lamm; "but I must say the case looks dubious at the present time. However, I'll let you know definitely very soon."

"Confound that man," muttered the detective, as he went down the stairs. "It is not at all improbable that he may find out some day that in dealing with a man of my standing and profession it will pay him to stick to the truth. One link more in the chain of evidence, and then good-by, Richard Fetridge!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADAME RAYMOND.

JOHN LAMM, confident that a conspiracy was to be found at the bottom of the North case, was reasonably sure already of two parties thereto—Marion Stackhouse and Richard Fetridge. Whether there was anybody else concerned he had not yet made up his mind. The plain yet puzzling charge of Thornton Stackhouse in the letter to the Moissot woman, who seemed to the detective to have been created for the express purpose of tantalizing him with the enigma of her existence, indicated that Stackhouse himself had reason to believe her the head and front of all offense.

Again and again John Lamm studied that letter, endeavoring to squeeze out of it the last drop of possible significance ; but the writer had so well chosen his words, with the evident purpose of making them unintelligible to a third person, that the detective was suspicious of what seemed the logical deductions therefrom. One thing was certain. Stackhouse charged Marie Moissot (the "person unknown" of Mr. Lamm's notes) with having carried to successful issue, on the 16th of June, a conspiracy to ruin him, and Mr. Lamm be-

lieved himself fully possessed of the unfortunate events which had overwhelmed this man during that day. The discovery of this unique charge of murder written in red on the wall of North's library, he did not forget was not the only misfortune. The extraordinary conduct of his wife was quite as serious to Stackhouse, not impossibly more so than this implied accusation. To be sure, these two conspicuous facts seemed to be part and parcel of one larger fact, and perhaps appeared to Mr. Stackhouse's mind as one thing; but the detective was altogether too cautious not to have seen that the letter might refer to either one of these calamities. The problem in John Lamm's mind, therefore, stood in this wise:

Q. Does Mr. Stackhouse hold Marie Moissot responsible for implicating him in the murder of his partner or in embittering his domestic relations?

Q. If the former were his belief, would he not have acquainted me with the fact?

And as Mr. Lamm could not help answering the latter question in the affirmative, he was still reasonably sure that there was no evidence in his possession of a third party to the great "conspiracy" which was so puzzling him.

Whence it seemed to be plain that his present duty was to center his efforts upon the two people whom he suspected—to investigate their doings thoroughly, to watch both of them with all possible vigilance.

To keep Marion Stackhouse under surveillance was a comparatively easy task. She had not left the confines of the North estate, except on the occasion of the funeral, since the discovery of her father's death ; and for a full report of her conduct for the immediate present Lamm felt he could safely rely on the vigilance of Moffett and Mollie White. But the movements of Richard Fetridge were not so easily followed. Consequently, John Lamm did not dare to trust this apparently most important task to anybody but himself and those under his active supervision.

On the Wednesday when he received Thomas's confidence in the Stella North affair, Lamm redoubled the safeguards and precautions previously taken to assure himself of the integrity of Richard Fetridge. Not that he ignored other possibilities of investigation. Into the past lives of Stackhouse and North and Marion he was already instituting the most careful inquiries ; but Fetridge's career interested him still more. With that affable good fellowship which made it possible for him to make friends with all sorts and conditions of men, he insinuated himself into the good graces of Fetridge's clerk, and hearing that Olsen had a predecessor who had been discharged for taking too much interest in his employer's affairs, he hunted up that man, with what degree of reward will be hereafter recorded.

He soon discovered that Mr. Fetridge had ceased to take active interest in legal work, that he had

but few clients, and that his chief business now seemed to be to look after the investments of his large property. John Lamm made arrangements to be accurately informed from day to day of a full list of the millionaire's office visitors, especially of those whom he took into his inner sanctum, and whose business with him appeared to be confidential.

It was in this way that he first became informed of the existence of Madame Raymond.

Here is the report furnished by Richard Fetridge's clerk, Olsen, late in the afternoon of Thursday:

"About three o'clock, a mighty pretty woman, whose complexion had evidently been toned up by artificial expedients, asked, in a tone of authority, if Mr. Fetridge was in. I said 'No'; but she might expect him in a few minutes. Would she sit down and wait? She would. She drew her chair up near the window, and looked out all the time. It struck me she was careful not to turn round when anybody came in. I may be wrong, but it occurred to me that she did this so as not to let her face be seen by any chance visitor.

"It was something like thirty minutes before the boss appeared. As soon as she heard his voice she turned round. The boss gave a start. 'Why, Madame Raymond,' he said, and surprised enough he was. But he hurried her toward his private office, saying something in a low tone, and looking over in my direction. But you may believe I was adding up a column of figures just at that time.

"Well, the two were closeted an hour together, and then the woman came out. Always the politest of men is my boss when a good-looking face is about. He danced attendance on her, and I heard him say, as he took her hand at the door :

"'Have no anxiety, my dear madam. Everything is being carefully looked after. Trust me to see that all comes out right.'

"And that was the last I saw of the woman."

Mr. Lamm, with all his eagerness to get at the case only intensified by these incomplete and unsatisfactory disclosures, requested his informant to let him know the instant that unknown woman appeared in Fetridge's office again.

He was prepared for an indefinite period of waiting, and the arrival of this brief message the morning of the day after he had given these last instructions, came as a pleasant surprise :

"She is here."

With all speed the detective made his way towards the substantial brick building where Richard Fetridge was usually to be found during business hours on any week-day of the year.

Waiting in the quiet corridor, Mr. Lamm found the place almost as deserted, this summer morning, as if it were a bank holiday. But the echo of a door closing on the flight above, and the sound of two voices, one of which was certainly Fetridge's, in amicable conversation, soon demanded his close attention.

It was a woman's voice that spoke the only "good-by" that came unmistakably to the ears of the detective; and a woman's light step heard on the stairway gave him assurance that the mysterious Madame Raymond was coming his way.

A slight built, willowly woman, this, thought Mr. Lamm, as he watched her pass near at hand, his own presence entirely unoticed. Pretty, an olive complexion, a little too much "made up"; large, lustrous eyes, black hair (her own undoubtedly), a very graceful figure. Altogether, as Mr. Lamm summed up the case, an attractive brunette on the sunny side of thirty, with something of a foreign air about her. Assuredly a visitor to Boston, wherever born and bred.

The graceful figure, well set off by a coquettish bonnet, which, like the summer wrap, had a pleasant contrast of color in it, flitted through the streets.

Followed by more than one admiring glance, the lady was followed also by Mr. Lamm, though not one of the many acquaintances with whom the detective exchanged a bow and a pleasant word would have suspected the fact.

Madam Raymond, hailing a South End car and taking a seat with dainty supervision of her skirts, looked at the shop windows past which her route took her, with languid curiosity. Mr. Lamm, two seats behind, did not seem to notice her. Madame Raymond left the car at a shady crossing; and Mr. Lamm, having seen her on to the footpath and well around the corner, swung off the car in his turn

and quite casually walked up the street which the lady had traversed just before.

Mr. Lamm was going by a modest-looking house, with a high doorstep, just as Madame Raymond was ringing the bell. She was admitted in a moment, and Mr. Lamm still walked on, turning the corner and taking a meditative promenade down a dusty avenue for a little distance.

But the now invisible magnet still drew him to that quiet little street and to the ninth house on the right in a distractingly regular row of highly-respectable looking dwellings. "A boarding-house," commented Mr. Lamm, as he leisurely looked at the windows on his way up the steps. "No need of a sign to tell that fact."

In his suave inquiry regarding eligible lodgings, the careworn landlady who opened the door took an instant interest. She liked the man's face, as she confided an hour later to an intimate friend in the millinery line, who chanced to call.

"We have a very good room back, up one flight, sir; quite near the bathroom."

"Ah!" The caller seemed to be considering. "I'm a quiet man of business, you understand. No gay roysterers, no noisy lodgers, no piano thumping at midnight, I suppose?"

"Dear me, no, sir," the landlady assured him. "Fact is, we're rather empty now. Only two clerks, very nice, steady young men, on the third floor, and a transient, a lady, who occupies the parlor bedroom front, second story."

"She's not musical?"

"I think not, sir. She's not sung since she came here, to my knowledge, a week ago last Wednesday, I think it was—yes, I am sure, for the man was sent in to whiten the walls that day, and that is how I came to remember it."

"Lady a transient, you say. Stranger, then, of course?"

"It's her first visit to Boston, she tells me. She lives in New York, and is here on a little business. Settling up an estate, I think, though she's not said so in just so many words."

"Ah! Well, in that case, she can't have many friends to call on her in the evening, and chatter, chatter, giggle, giggle for hours together?"

The landlady smiled and shook her head. Lamm resumed, in a very friendly, off-hand fashion.

"You see, ma'am, I should be quite near her room if I concluded to come here, and as I'm a quiet man and go to bed early, I don't want to be kept awake by late and noisy callers or any other lodgers. That was the objection at my last place, ma'am."

The landlady smoothed her apron complacently. "No such difficulty here, sir," she said with confidence. "Why, Madame Raymond has only had one caller since she's been here, and I don't know as you can call it a caller either, for he merely came home with her the evening of the day after the lady took the room here. Yes, it was Thursday week. I noticed him with her at the door when I answered

her ring. It was after nine o'clock, and I had got worried about her, being a stranger and so on, so that I was very glad to see she had company. 'My brother,' she said to me, and a nice appearing gentleman he was. I liked his face. Well, he came in and had a quiet talk with the lady—a talk that you couldn't hear an inch outside the room, and couldn't possibly disturb anybody. Madame Raymond has been out once or twice, but no one else has called on her, and I am sure that nothing she and the brother could say, if he should come to see her again, could possibly disturb you, sir."

Mr. Lamm was very far indeed from sharing this opinion of the lady who so desired his presence as a lodger. But his face wore a look of entire, unqualified assent. He asked to see the much-commended apartment "back, up one flight," approved its arrangements, and declared the price very reasonable.

But the best guarantee of his satisfaction was that he actually decided to take the room at once. A week's rent in advance was deposited in the landlady's willing hand. Mr. Lamm took a receipt for the money with a latchkey rolled up therewith, and, saying that he might come in to occupy the room at any time, bade the woman "good-day" and went toward his office, with thoughts in plenty to occupy his attention.

He had quite made up his mind that it was high time to come to a thorough understanding with the man to whose cause he had almost determined to

ally himself—Thornton Stackhouse. It was with genuine pleasure, therefore, that he found that gentleman awaiting him in his inner office. Something about the man had excited his sympathies from the first, and he never felt more kindly disposed toward him than on the present occasion. He looked into his haggard face anxiously, and after that look he did not need to hear the man speak to know that he had come to make some important disclosure.

CHAPTER XIX.

"SO LONG AS SHE LIVES I AM IN DANGER."

ON his return to headquarters from some business in connection with the North case, Friday morning, a week after the discovery of the murder, Inspector Applebee found a genuine surprise awaiting him.

"There is a lady in there who has been waiting to see you for some time," observed one of his assistants, and immediately after the inspector found himself closeted with the identical lady whose reception of him on a previous occasion had led him to denounce her to his superior as an idiotic and unavailable personage—none other, in fact, than Aunt Comfort Harwood.

It is not probable that the good old lady recognized in Mr. Applebee the gentleman whom she supposed to have been in the gas or water business when he visited her at Swampscott.

The chaotic condition of her mind at that time had been no more pronounced than her agitation and excitement on the present occasion.

"Oh! my dear Mr. Policeman," said Aunt Comfort, hastening to open a little reticule which she carried at her side, as soon as her eyes fell on the

inspector's portly form. "Oh! my dear Mr. Policeman—if you are the proper man—yes, thank you—I have found the most awful thing in the house, and, though Mrs. Stackhouse said it was all nonsense, I could not rest till I had brought it to you."

"You come from Mr. North's, I believe?" said the inspector. "You were his sister-in-law?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; poor man! And to think that he should have such frightful communications as this sent to him, and should keep them a secret from everybody in the house, when his own wife's sister—but it is just like him! He was so thoughtful of everybody except himself."

She had already excitedly thrust in the inspector's hand an envelope, of which the seal was broken.

A glance showed him that it was postmarked "Boston, May 10," of this same year, and that it was without any distinctive mark to betray its authorship. It was superscribed in a feminine hand, "Paul, North, Esq., Marlboro Street, Boston, Mass." The envelope contained a sheet of common notepaper, on which was written in the same chirography as that of the superscription, the following:

"My Dear Sir.—Pardon the freedom of a complete stranger, but believe in me you have a well-wisher. It is I who should warn you against trusting fortune or character in the hands of Mr. Albert Runyon. At least before doing so, permit that I advise you to investigate the history of his past. He is a serpent in the grass, who has ruined systematically

everybody who in him confided, and will ruin you in the same way. I beg you will not treat this warning lightly, for if you disregard it you will surely come to grief sooner or later, and will remember when it is too late, my good advice. A word to the wise is sufficient. "A FRIEND."

The inspector read this letter through twice very carefully before he uttered a word. Who was Albert Runyon?

Mr. Applebee was sure that he had never heard the name before.

"Well," said the inspector, "you did very right to bring this to me. Where did you find it?"

Aunt Comfort explained after a deal of circumlocution, which it is unnecessary to reproduce, that she had accidentally come across it in examining some papers of her late brother-in-law, which until recently had reposed under lock and key in his writing desk at the Marlboro Street house.

The inspector quieted her agitation by assuring her that she had done her full duty in immediately referring this matter to the police, and that they would take steps to investigate it.

As soon as Miss Harwood had gone, the inspector showed the letter to his chief.

"This is one of that kind of matters in which the newspapers are of the most service," said that potentate, after a brief reflection. "We might keep this thing in our possession for a dog's age, and never know any more about it than we do now. If, however, the newspapers publish it we stand an even chance of hearing something about this Mr.

Runyon—if the clue amounts to anything at all, which is doubtful. By the way, did you ask the old lady if she had ever heard of any person of that name?"

"To be sure I did," said the inspector, "and she expresses complete ignorance. I think I'll make some inquiries of Stackhouse as to whether there was any such man to his knowledge associated with North in business, before giving the thing to the newspapers."

"To be sure," said the inspector; "but it's doubtful. Apparently North attached no importance to the communication, for if he had made any talk about it, we should have heard of the thing before."

With the letter in his pocket, Inspector Applebee set out at once in quest of the junior partner.

Inspector Applebee, however, had some difficulty in finding Thornton Stackhouse.

The fact was that at this moment he was engaged in an earnest conference with Detective John Lamm at the latter's office.

"I have come to you, Mr. Lamm," Mr. Stackhouse had said, as soon as Mr. Lamm had closed the door of the inner office, "for the purpose of giving you a little information with reference to personal matters, which I ought, perhaps, to have mentioned to you before."

Stackhouse looked rather perturbed, and refrained from meeting the steady gaze of the man whom he addressed.

"I trust," said Lamm, "that it is not too late now."

"No," rejoined Stackhouse nervously; "no, it is not too late for you; for me it may be."

There was something despondently apprehensive in the tones of the man as he said these words, but overcoming with apparent effort his tendency to despair, he went on at once in a tone of forced briskness.

"Mr. Lamm, I entrusted you in the first place with all that occurred to me to have any special bearing upon the North case, when I engaged you."

The detective's raised eyebrows evidently conveyed his surprise at this statement, for Stackhouse went on immediately: "Yes; it is not about that, but about things immediately growing out of it that I have come to speak to you now, Mr. Lamm; in other words of my serious domestic troubles. And, believe me, I could not say to you what I now do if I did not know that I am speaking to a trustworthy man in absolute confidence."

Mr. Lamm made an appreciative gesture.

"The truth is, sir, that I am utterly unable to account for the extraordinary conduct of my wife. Up to the day of this murder, sir, since the time that I married her, Mr. Lamm, we have been on the best of terms—the best of terms," he repeated, reflectively, as if half losing himself in dreamy reminiscence.

"And since?" the detective insinuated.

Mr. Stackhouse's reply involved a substantially

accurate description of the scene which had followed his arrival at home on the afternoon of the 17th of June, a statement which it may naturally be conceived caused the detective far less astonishment than it might have in some circumstances. But John Lamm was delighted to have an opportunity to discuss this matter with his client.

"And how do you account for this?" he queried.

"I don't account for it," answered Stackhouse. "I cannot account for it. It is a great and frightful nightmare; the puzzle of my whole life. Believe me, sir, you know absolutely as much about it as I do."

"Still," suggested Mr. Lamm, "you might have means of surmising which I do not possess."

"Ah, indeed," returned Stackhouse, "and if it were not for that fact I should not have come here. Yes, indeed, I do have means of surmising, Mr. Lamm. My wife, as an explanation of her impossible conduct, simply uttered a name which, I am sorry to say, I know altogether too well—"

"The name was—?"

"Marie Moissot."

"Ah!" said the detective. "A curious name; French?"

"No, curse her," returned Stackhouse, vindictively. "She was a Creole, I tell you, Lamm, and a jealous, dangerous woman. I knew her years ago, but certainly had almost forgotten her existence until this day, when I find her name upon my wife's lips."

"Plainly," said the detective, as Stackhouse hesitated, "what did you know of this woman?"

Stackhouse averted his eyes and drummed moodily upon the desk with his fingers for a considerable space without replying.

"Mr. Lamm," he said at last, "the Moissot episode in my experience is one I am not fond of calling to mind. I met the girl when she was about sixteen years old—where it matters not—I thought I was fond of her—and was caught in the snares of her pretty face. My acquaintance with her did not last long. The vindictive temper and insane jealousy of the girl, who was more of a woman than most of our Northern females of twice her age, warned me that I had made a mistake."

"The parting was not voluntary on her part?"

Stackhouse ground his teeth; his lips were dry and feverish; under the table his fists, the detective noticed, were clenched.

"Certainly not," said Stackhouse. "That would have been impossible."

"Ah!" said the detective. "Unfortunate."

"Unfortunate!" echoed Stackhouse. "Good heavens, man, it was madness—insanity!"

"And—poor policy," added the detective significantly. "But bygones are irretrievable. And so it is this woman whom you suspect to have poisoned your wife's mind against you? Well, sir, have you told me all that is necessary for me to know?"

"There is nothing else of the past that concerns

you and me, Mr. Lamm," said Stackhouse, nervously, wiping the perspiration from his brow, "Except this. Eight years ago I accidentally heard that Marie Moissot was living in New York under another name. A few years later an adventuress blazed into notoriety in the great metropolis, under the name of Madame Perle, who tallied well with the description of this Marie. That she was the same person I am unable definitely to determine. I have only seen her photograph. I did not investigate nearer."

Detective Lamm was becoming hugely interested.

"So, so," he exclaimed. "Well, and what have you done?"

"Done!" echoed Stackhouse, giving him a startled look.

"Yes, I mean recently, since the trouble with your wife—with reference to obtaining information concerning this woman."

"I'll be entirely frank with you," said Stackhouse. "I hesitated about making anybody a confidant in this purely personal matter. I therefore inserted an advertisement in Monday morning's papers, offering to pay for information of this woman. That advertisement was answered, and it brought me to a house in Shawmut Avenue, where I have excellent reasons for believing that this woman has been; which shows conclusively that my surmises in regard to her having poisoned my wife's mind in person were correct. But my efforts to see this Marie have been baffled by the interven-

tion of a cunning demon in petticoats whom she deputed to meet me. I have written to her, but receiving no reply am obliged to place the matter in your hands. Mr. Lamm, do you think you can help me?"

Nothing could conceal the intense anxiety, the almost hungry look of supplication in the junior partner's face.

"Ah!" said the detective to himself, "whatever this man's past may have been, one thing of his present life is eminently plain. He loves his wife."

"And you, then, don't suspect," he said aloud, "this woman of complicity in the murder of your partner?"

"I suspect her of nothing that is good and everything that is bad," said Stackhouse bitterly. "I know that this woman hates me with one of those hatreds that will never forget nor forgive. Wherever I am so long as she lives, I am in danger. She is revengeful, and, more than all, accomplished and unscrupulous."

"Accomplished?" repeated Lamm quickly. "Do you use that word intentionally, Mr. Stackhouse?"

"I certainly do," replied Thornton Stackhouse. "She has all the native ability of a naturally shrewd and cunning woman, who has lost less by the neglect of her education in letters than she has gained through her direct contact with the world."

"Well, then," said Lamm, drawing a full breath, "I cannot work in the dark. I must have the

fullest possible description of Marie Moissot at the very latest hour known to you."

"Of course," said Stackhouse quickly, "I knew that and came prepared. I have brought you the photograph I spoke of. It was obtained for me seven years ago by a friend of mine—the photograph of Madame Perle! All I can say of it is that if Madame Perle be not Marie Moissot, the resemblance between the two women is strange and striking indeed."

John Lamm had some difficulty to conceal his delight, as Thornton Stackhouse placed upon the table before his eyes the counterfeit presentiment of the object of Thornton Stackhouse's fears.

There was no question about it. Madame Perle was Madame Raymond!

When Thornton Stackhouse reissued from John Lamm's den the efficient custodians who kept him constantly under surveillance had already notified Inspector Applebee of his whereabouts. Mr. Stackhouse was therefore surprised to find a hand laid lightly upon his shoulder.

"One thing," said the voice of the inspector in his ear; "just one thing, Mr. Stackhouse. I wont detain you a moment. Do you know, or have you ever known, a person calling himself Albert Runyon?"

Stackhouse staggered and steadied himself against the building for support. He fairly gasped for breath.

"What's the matter?" said the inspector, with quick suspicion.

"It is my heart," said Stackhouse hurriedly. "A sudden start you gave me. I have trouble that way. The life insurance physicians have warned me."

"Excuse me," apologized the inspector. "I didn't mean to startle you. The object of my inquiry you will find by reading this letter, which seems to have been sent anonymously to your partner about six weeks ago."

Stackhouse took the letter and read it, and at the end his agitation had almost vanished. He gave it back, coolly, to the officer.

"I am sorry I cannot help you," he said; "the man is an utter stranger to me."

CHAPTER XX.

ASTONISHING DISCLOSURES OF WILLARD SMITH.

MEANTIME the police department had quietly made an important arrest, and had succeeded in astonishing themselves more than their prisoner.

The affair had begun in the afternoon of Wednesday at the hour when the inebriated blackmailer left the office of Richard Fetridge, and while John Lamm was demanding an explanation from the discomfited millionaire.

"Your name is Willard Smith," said a muscular man in an uncompromising voice, suddenly stepping in front of the man whose breath smelt of liquor as he came down the stairs from Richard Fetridge's office. There was no interrogatory inflection in the sentence. It was stated as a quiet, matter-of-fact announcement.

"That's my name," returned the unsuspecting inebriate, bristling a little with a ludicrous assumption of offended dignity. "And what of it?"

"This of it," said the muscular man in a tone of authority. "You're under arrest. You must come with me."

The suddenness of this unexpected announcement acted like a dash of cold water in the face. The

ex-clerk of North & Stackhouse lost a shade of his normal color and took a staggering step backward.

"Me! Under arrest!" he exclaimed, nearly sobered by the ominous situation. "There must be some mistake. I'm not drunk. At least not drunk enough to be arrested for it. And besides"—picking up a little courage as he surveyed his unwelcome acquaintance—"you're not an officer."

The muscular man turned back the lapel of his coat and exhibited his badge.

"You are not arrested for being drunk, my man; and you know that very well. Now come. Shall I put on the twisters, or will you walk quietly?"

The young man cast a hasty, frightened look about him. Two other men in citizen's clothes, who had been standing in the corridor looking quietly on, now approached.

"And these—these fellows—are they officers, too?"

"Shouldn't wonder," returned the muscular man with a grim smile. "Now there's no need of attracting attention and making a hullabaloo about it. I'll trouble you for your arm. Glad you're sensible. Now put your best foot forward. March!"

The man seemed to obey mechanically. He was walking out of the building arm in arm with the officer. The two other men fell quietly into step behind them. The whole affair had been so brief and unobtrusive that it had not even attracted a glance of inquiry from the people who stood about.

But just before he came to the street the prisoner seemed to awake from his stupefaction and exclaimed, in a voice suppliant and terrified :

"For heaven's sake tell me what I am arrested for ?"

"It's not my place to tell you that," replied his custodian sternly. "I am instructed to take you to headquarters. You'll be told soon enough there, I reckon."

"But it's all a mistake, I tell you," whimpered the prisoner, who seemed to be woefully lacking in fortitude.

"That's for you to settle with the inspectors. I haven't made any mistake," returned the custodian. And the little group passed into the street.

The prisoner made no physical resistance, though he continued to remonstrate verbally till he reached the grim building in Pemberton Square, where his fate was to be settled. By this time the effects of his morning's libations seemed to have left him. He was haggard and apprehensive, and as he went up the steps into the corridor, he trembled like a conscience-stricken criminal taken in the act.

He was led on through a room filled with tables and men engaged in writing, and was pushed unceremoniously through a doorway into a quiet inner office, where he found himself face to face with Inspector Applebee and his chief. The man who had brought him closed the door.

"So this is the man ?" said Applebee, surveying him curiously.

"This is the discharged clerk, Willard Smith," said the officer.

"So indeed it is. I should recognize him by his photograph. Sergeant, will you wait outside?"

The man who had conducted Mr. Smith thither bowed and went out. Inspector Applebee locked the door..

"Sit down, my man," he said, facing the prisoner. Mr. Smith sank into a chair.

"They told me—" he faltered, "these fellows who brought me here—that I was arrested; but they wouldn't say what for. They said you'd tell me."

He looked eagerly and apprehensively from one grave face to the other. After regarding him critically, Applebee whispered a few words in the ear of his superior. The chief nodded. Both regarded the prisoner sharply.

"Come," said Applebee, "make a clean breast of it, my man, if you want the law to let you off easy. Now is your time. Don't wait till it's too late. Out with it!"

"But I don't know who—what you mean," stammered the man, turning very pale indeed. "If you'll be so kind as to say what I'm arrested for."

"Oh, certainly," returned the inspector; "we'll oblige you to that extent. You're arrested for murder."

The man started out of his chair, opening his eyes very wide, repeated the ominous word, and sank back again.

"Whose?" he gasped. "Whose murder?"

"Paul North."

The wretch opened his mouth, but was unable to articulate. He sat back in his chair, staring helplessly, and clutching at the clothing about his neck as if he found it too tight for him. The charge seemed to have produced a complete collapse.

"It is now or never," whispered the chief as Applebee leaned over the desk to obtain possession of a document. "He'll confess if he's worked right."

Inspector Applebee having obtained the paper he was in search of, unfolds it. It is the anonymous letter demanding $1000 from Paul North and threatening his life in case he failed to comply with the imposed conditions. He advances toward the prisoner, holding this document behind him. Seeing him approach, Willard Smith starts into a half-erect attitude.

"For Heaven's sake, explain this!" he exclaims. "It is some awful joke or other. I kill Paul North! Why, I couldn't kill anybody."

And indeed his appearance at this moment seems to corroborate the statement.

"Look at this," says Inspector Applebee, suddenly putting the letter before his eyes. "Did you ever see that before?"

The man starts, gasps, and seems to be suffering under a severe attack of fever and ague.

"My letter!" he chatters in a voice barely audible. "My letter! Well, what next?"

"Ah," said the inspector to his chief, "he recognizes it as his letter."

"But—but—I don't understand where you got—got it," stammered the man, with more the appearance of bewilderment than fear.

"So?" queried the inspector. "Ah, but we have got it. And you have acknowledged the authorship of it. That's the main point."

"But I never mailed that letter," exclaimed the prisoner, starting up wildly, with a gleam of hope in his eyes. "I see how it is. Somebody has been playing tricks on me."

"You never mailed it!" repeated the inspector, incredulously. "Then who did?"

"I wish I knew; I don't."

"So? Well, then, what did you write it for?"

"I wrote it when I was drunk—mad—crazy!" cried the prisoner excitedly. "I never could have done it if I had been in my senses. And when I came out of it I missed the letter. I looked everywhere for it. I thought I must have torn it up. But as I see it is here—you—somebody must have picked it up and mailed it."

"Oh, there's no doubt but that somebody mailed it," returned Applebee, significantly.

"Yes, but I didn't. I take my solemn oath to it, sir. Unless—unless I was too drunk to know it when I did it. And besides—besides," he continued, eagerly, as a new thought struck him, "I couldn't very well have killed a man when I wasn't with him, could I? You'd think it likely, Mr. Chief

of Police, that the man who was with him at the time of his death—"

He paused abruptly and glanced in mute appeal from one face to another.

"Well?" said the inspector, sharply, "go on. If you're speaking the truth you don't have to stop and think."

"No," said the man, evidently nerving himself for a disagreeable duty. 'No, sir; I don't have to stop and think, but I don't like to accuse a man of a thing like this. I don't, and that's the truth."

"Your only chance is in prompt and full confession," said the chief inspector. "Tell us everything you know."

"Well, then, I will," said the prisoner with the air of having made up his mind. "I'll tell you all about it, way from the beginning."

It would be difficult to say which side was the more anxious at this point, the accusers or the accused. There was this marked difference—the prisoner let his anxiety be seen; the trained faces of the inspectors masked their emotions completely. As the man began evidently with the intention of speaking at considerable length, the chief inspector nonchalantly drew a block of paper in front of him, dipped his pen in the ink, and prepared to take notes.

"You may have heard, gentlemen," said Willard Smith, "how I came to take to drinking heavily. I was a clerk for North & Stackhouse, doing well, saving all I could scrape together, with the inten-

tion of starting in for myself one day. I and my sister had got together some $3000." The man paused an instant and seemed to be recovering from a slight tendency to choke. Glancing around the room and then at his clothes hastily, he said, "I wasn't like this always, you know. Well, it's a short enough story and common enough. I was old enough to have known better, but I didn't. Everybody was investing, and I caught the fever, and put all my money into Nicaragua Midland stock. I had hesitated to do it till the price was up. Well, when the thing turned and began to go down I held on, hoping for another change, until—well, there was nothing to hold on to. Meantime my sister, who had worked her fingers off to lay up that money, got to worrying, fell sick and died. When I paid the funeral expenses—. But, pshaw! you gentlemen are not interested in that. It's quickly said. I didn't care what came, and I took to drinking heavily. One morning I woke up to find my place at North & Stackhouse's filled. I wont say anything against Mr. North. He treated me as well as he could. He advised me not to invest when I did, and several times when I wanted money after my discharge I went to him and he gave it to me. So that's all there was about it. But sometimes when I was drunk, I would get to feeling pretty sore against the firm, and it was at one of those times that I wrote that letter you have there."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, that must have been three weeks ago. And then, as I tell you, when I sobered off again I began to be frightened, and looked for the letter to destroy it, but I couldn't find it. I thought perhaps I had torn it up, though I couldn't remember it. Well, then, to come down to the night Mr. North was killed. I was coming across the Public Garden with a friend of mine."

"A friend?" asked the inspector, sharply. "Name and address, please."

"The name," said the prisoner, a blush rising into his pale face, "is Dick Hunt; his address—any place where liquor is sold and he admitted; at other times, Deer Island. He's not an acquaintance to be proud of, I'll admit, but, gentlemen, I'm telling the whole truth. We were both of us with sufficient taste in our mouths to be crazy for more, but we had neither money nor credit. So when I saw Paul North and Richard Fetridge ahead of us, I dogged their steps."

"What time was this?" the inspector asked quickly.

"Somewhere after seven o'clock. I can't say how much after, but a little after. And I says to this fellow with me, 'Dick, you see that old duffer there? He was once the head of my place of business. If I can strike him right, I'll get a fiver out of him and we'll make a night of it.' Well, of course, that was agreeable. But I was sober enough to see that if I walked up to the old man when he had company with him he would like as not get

mad. So I waited for him to get rid of Fetridge. We followed them then down to Marlboro Street, and saw the two men go into North's house. Not more than three minutes after this, a stylish dressed woman, who had been following down on the other sidewalk, crossed over and rang the bell. And she went in too."

The chief inspector dropped his pen with a start.

"Be careful what you say," said the inspector in a warning tone; "if you are lying it will be used against you."

"Good Heavens! I feel as if I was on trial for my life now!" exclaimed the prisoner. "It's gospel truth, gentlemen, every word of it, as I hope for mercy hereafter."

"These three people went into the house, and you stood watching in front of it?"

"Just the truth, sir. And we waited and waited, walking up and down, for we wanted the money bad, and I was pretty sure I could get it from Mr. North. I had tried it before, you see. But I knew him too well to disturb him when he was busy; and I thought he was busy—perhaps selling the house to Fetridge. We came pretty near giving it up, but at last we saw the woman come out and start up street."

"So indeed!" exclaimed Applebec, greatly perturbed. "What time was that?"

"It was not quite nine, but must have been very near it. I remember hearing the bell strike afterwards, and not a great many minutes afterwards, either."

"How near did she pass you?"

"Near enough for me to see her; for at that minute I stood directly at the foot of the steps."

"Did you recognize her?"

"No; for she was a stranger to me."

"Be particular now. Are you acquainted with North's two daughters"

"I know them by sight, sir."

"And this woman was not the younger one?"

"She was not either of them. Nothing like them, sir. Not in the least—anything about her."

"Can't you describe her?"

But Willard Smith's impressions were not sufficiently vivid to enable him to present a photographic likeness.

"Go on, then," said the inspector. "What happened next?"

"Why, you see, sir, this Mr. Fetridge was directly behind her, and when he came down the steps I was tired of waiting. So I put a bold face on it and touched him on the shoulder."

"You spoke to him then?"

"To be sure I did. I pretended to call him North by mistake, and then affecting to discover my error I told Mr. Fetridge what I was going to ask Mr. North. If he couldn't help a poor fellow out by lending him five dollars. He stopped short, gave me one look that took me all in, and, says he, 'Good heavens, Smith! Are you reduced to this? I—I'm sorry for you'—just like that, and put the money in my hand."

"What was his appearance—his manner?" ques-

tioned the chief. "Was it unusual? Did he show any sign of excitement?"

"I thought he was a little excited, sir, when I first touched him he jumped so; but I was in too much of a hurry to be off with my money to stop long after he gave it to me."

"Then you didn't stay long enough to see anything more?"

"I stayed long enough to see him go up street with the woman. Nothing else."

"And you saw nobody else go out or come in while you were there?"

"I did not."

"Think now. Wasn't there another woman?"

"There was not," answered the prisoner, positively. "Both of us were watching all the time. Nobody else went out or came in during the whole time. I can swear to it."

"Well, then," said the chief sternly, "why didn't you come to the police with the story when you first heard of the murder?"

"Because I went to see Mr. Fetridge about it, and he told me not to—he—he gave me money not to. At least—well, the first time he said 'Don't do it,' and then asked, kind of insinuating: 'Aren't you in need of money?' Of course I said yes, and then he gave me ten dollars."

The inspectors exchanged glances of astonishment.

"And—and afterwards," resumed the man after a brief hesitation, "when I had drunk up this money, I went to him and—and demanded more."

"Demanded!" echoed Applebee. "And he—"

"Gave it to me."

The inspector looked incredulous. The prisoner's trembling fingers wandered to a pocket of his vest. He produced a crisp new ten-dollar bill. "Here it is," he affirmed. "They arrested me just as I was coming away."

Applebee turned to the chief and began a hurried conversation in whispers. The miserable fellow in the chair opposite them watched them with eyes of awful apprehension.

Suddenly Applebee turned to him again.

"One question, my man. Where did you pass the remainder of the night?"

The man mentioned several places and the names of several individuals.

"Well, my man," said the inspector, "you'll have to go to jail for a time; but I hope it may be short. We'll do what we can for you if we find you've told us the truth. You understand. We meant what we said when we advised you to confess."

For circumstances had suddenly changed this man from a prospective defendant in a murder trial to a possible government witness of prime importance.

As Willard Smith, dejected and ashamed, was led away between the officers who came to conduct him to jail the chief inspector was saying, in an excited undertone, to Inspector Applebee—

"Money or no money, it will make no difference. If I get these men to corroborate this fellow's story, I'll arrest Richard Fetridge without an hour's delay."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HEAD OF THE SERPENT.

WITHOUT denying that the press, in these days of sharp news competition, occasionally clogs the wheels of justice in the effort to supply the public with the latest news in great criminal affairs (in little ones, where the interest is not great, there is little fault to be found), it must none the less be said that in most cases the extreme publicity given to the details becomes in itself a mighty engine of detection. Possessed of all the facts, the entire public is resolved into a detective force. The salient points of the case, which in other countries are kept profoundly secret among a few men, are in everybody's mouth. The people are made familiar with the appearance, the histories, the peculiar facts in the lives of the victim, and of those suspected of complicity in the crime. The result is that a few hours after the publication of the important details of a mysterious crime people begin to flock to the offices of the great newspapers, eager to contribute the mite of information which they possess. As time goes on, and the facts gain a wider and wider circulation, even that ever-lessening circle which poverty, ignorance, or stupidity isolates from

the fountain-head of general information, the newspaper, is reached, and if there is any suspicious fact known to any disinterested person in the community it is more than likely to be brought to light through the same peculiar channel.

The North case was certainly not an anomaly in this respect. North & Stackhouse were too well known through their dealings with the public not to have left all sorts of "clues" and suspicious circumstances in the past, which were sure to come out as soon as the dreadful crime set everybody talking about them. To Thomas were referred daily several people who came to the *Globe* office for the purpose of affording, through that journal, some assistance in carrying on the important investigation, which, though as yet so little successful, had set everybody agog with wonder. From these people the reporter learned that North and Stackhouse had many enemies, more or less bitter and personal, rising from their questionable business transactions: but there was nothing which impressed him as sufficiently promising to be important until the morning of Saturday, June 25, a gentleman called who related a little circumstance which seemed to him pregnant with possible significance. It certainly lacked no element of romantic and mysterious interest.

It was an episode in a Boston broker's office in which a very pretty woman figured. The man could not recall all the details, but he recollected that this woman had preceded him in the occupancy

of an inner office, and that while he was waiting for her to come out he heard scraps of a very animated conversation of which North & Stackhouse were the subject. In the partition between the outer and inner office were a series of large windows, which were generally in various degrees of openness. As he stood with his back against the partition, the narrator could not well avoid hearing the conversation between the broker and his fair client, and after the glimpse he had caught of the latter his curiosity was considerably aroused. The broker seemed to have been defending the reputation of North & Stackhouse, on the ground that it was necessary to expect just such phenomena in the stock market, but the woman, who seemed to have been a heavy loser in the Nicaragua Midland, was unsparing in her denunciations of the firm, which she delivered in not especially choice English with a slight foreign accent, but in the bitterest and most vindictive tone imaginable.

"Hush!" said the broker suddenly; "there is Mr. Stackhouse now." And sure enough the junior partner of the aforesaid firm was crossing the office at that minute. Immediately there was a suppresed scream, followed by a rustle of silk, and the door between the inner and outer offices closed with a violence that caused the listener to rebound from the partition. The clerks looked up from their writing. Stackhouse himself appeared slightly startled, but he seemed to be in a hurry and transacted his business and hastened out in a short space

of time. Meanwhile in the inner office the broker was addressing his client in tones of solicitous alarm. What was the matter?

"And do you mean to tell me that *that* man was this Mr. Stackhouse of North & Stackhouse?" the woman said hurriedly.

"To be sure he is," answered the broker.

"And it is to *that* man that I was entrusting my money?"

There was such a dangerous inflection in the woman's voice that the broker was apparently surprised into silence, and immediately she broke out in the most violent imprecations and epithets which the listener had ever heard pass a woman's lips.

"Why," said the narrator to the reporter, "I felt as if I were standing outside a cage watching a mad tigress expending her strength on the iron bars. I didn't know what she could have against Thornton Stackhouse, but I thought I would rather be in any position than in that man's shoes with such a woman in his wake. But as it was none of my business, I ceased to trouble myself about it."

This was the extent of the informant's observation. He was buttonholed by a business acquaintance at that minute, and heard and saw no more except that the woman shortly afterward went out, and that her passion had left her very pale for one of her complexion. That this episode might be of value had not occurred to him till he had read an article in that morning's *Globe* suggesting a conspiracy against Stackhouse; but he desired to

give the information in strict confidence, as he did not care to be placed in the light of an eavesdropper before his business associates. Mr. Thomas assured him that he might rest easy on that score, and hastened to follow up the new clue.

It was with a glow of genuine excitement that after an hour's interview with the broker, in whose office this episode had occurred, Mr. Thomas hastened to the office of John Lamm.

He met the detective at the foot of the stairs, and they went up together. The outer office was occupied, and Lamm led the way to his den. Scarcely a word had been interchanged. Both men were eager to speak.

"I've got something that will surprise you," said Thomas, "so prepare to sponge out a few of the figures on your slate and begin on a new scent."

"Yes?"

"You have had your say about Marion Stackhouse. Now, I simply want to show you that there are others who have shown themselves to be more vindictive enemies of her husband than she has. I bring you a new name."

"Not the Albert Runyon which appears in the anonymous letter to North which you published yesterday?"

"No, sir; something more tangible than that. Madame Raymond."

Thomas had expected Lamm to present a face of deep professional interest, but to his chagrin the detective actually laughed.

"You don't mean to say, my friend, that you have just heard of her? Why, I've been working on her for days!"

Thomas stared.

"Then you don't care to hear what I have discovered?"

"By all means," said Lamm, regaining his seriousness. "It may be just what I need to round out the facts already in my possession."

The reporter began his story. He first told what his voluntary informant had told him, and then of his visit to the broker. It appeared that the latter had a distinct recollection of the episode in his office, though he professed to attach no importance to it, to see no connection between it and subsequent events. To be sure the woman had acted unaccountably strange; but weren't women always doing something that no man would ever think of? However, the broker was willing to give the reporter every possible aid. The woman's name was Mme. Marie Raymond, and she had been a customer in stocks for some two years. She was a New York woman, and had been remarkably lucky in all her experiments except the bubble Nicaragua Midland. To the fact of her losses the broker wholly atrributed her conduct on the occasion in question, which had been about six weeks previous. She was not the person to bear any defeat with equanimity.

"And now," said John Lamm, "when does he say he was last visited by this woman?"

"Not since that occasion. All her business had been done by mail, postmarked New York."

"Umha! And did he mention that he sent her to Richard Fetridge?"

"No."

"Well, he did, Thomas, unwittingly; and as sure as you are sitting in that chair you have just related to me the initial scene of the tragedy in Paul North's house."

Thomas stared at his friend, the detective, to assure himself that he was in earnest and in his right mind. But there could be no doubt on either point.

"And then," said the reporter eagerly, "you give up the idea that Marion Stackhouse originated the conspiracy?"

"Well," returned Lamm, "I give up very little. My opinions have been enlarged and modified to suit the new facts—not changed. However, it's not theories you want now, but facts. Let me give you an idea of what work I have been doing since our last conference."

The detective took out his notebook, opened it upon his knee, and referred to his hieroglyphics.

"Yes, Mr. Thomas, your broker quite unwittingly sent Madame Raymond, *alias* Madame Perle, and as a matter of fact, Marie Moissot, creole, born in New Orleans, twenty-seven years ago, to Richard Fetridge. Her conference with the broker was May 10. Her appearance in Richard Fetridge's office was May 11. *Ergo*, Mr. Broker-man must

have casually mentioned it as reported in the street that North & Stackhouse are all right because backed by Richard Fetridge."

Thomas marveled at the apparent accuracy of his friend's statements.

"In the name of wonder, where have you been the past forty-eight hours?" he asked.

"My sources of information are confidential but reliable," said the detective. "The almighty dollar will sometimes open the mouth of the confidential servant that is, while the confidential servant that was, if he is approached properly, is ever ready to get his old master into a scrape. And, besides that, I have received the confessions of a gentleman who shall be nameless, whose means of judgment are unexceptional."

"I understand dimly, but enough. Never mind the how; let's have the what."

"At once, my boy. The 11th of last May, Madame Raymond visited Richard Fetridge for the first time. When she came in at the door he looked upon an entire stranger. She came openly to discover the exact standing of North & Stackhouse as a firm, and of North and Stackhouse as individuals. In the midst of their conference about Stackhouse, the woman began to talk in a loud voice, uttering such sentences as these: 'Thornton Stackhouse must go to the wall, my friend, wife or no wife! He shant escape me, now that I know him! The man I have been turning heaven and earth to find! I shall denounce him, ruin him—

make him feel the same degradation of social scorn that he has made others feel.' Thereupon Mr. Fetridge, observing that this extraordinary speech had attracted the attention of his clerk, who has forgotten himself so far as to stare at the woman with his mouth open, hustles his mysterious visitor with mysterious haste into his inner office, and not only closes the door, but locks it. The conference lasted fully two hours. Fetridge came out once or twice to dismiss some visitor or other, and the change in his color and manner was so marked that the clerk was greatly impressed. So much so, in fact, that he began to wonder and to watch for madame's return."

"It is plain where you got your information, Lamm. But go on. His secret is as safe with both of us as with one."

"Did I not know that, Mr. Kingman F. Thomas, this offensive and defensive alliance of ours would never have been formed. Well, the clerk waited some days in vain for the return of the madame. But he avows on his honor that he never met a man so systematically irritable, abstracted, and nervous as was Richard Fetridge during the interim. Finally, on the 14th of last month, Madame Raymond visited the office a second time. On this occasion our friend Fetridge received her eagerly, and bade his clerk inform all callers that he was out. They retired to the inner office. The clerk could not restrain his curiosity, and he attempted to satisfy it by applying both eye and ear to the keyhole. The

door was opened upon him suddenly, and his attitude and confusion were considered by Richard Fetridge good grounds for his peremptory discharge.

"His unfortunate effort had only put him into possession of the following statement from the lips of the woman; and you can easily imagine that it meant worse than nothing to him:

"'Mr. Fetridge, you and I understand each other, then. You will go to New Orleans: thence to Montreal. You will then find out that every word I have told you is the truth. When you return, you will meet me in New York. I will come to Boston with you, and we will act together.'"

"Whew!" ejaculated Thomas, whose eyes gleamed with excitement. "This is most extraordinary."

"Then what will you say to the sequel, my boy? Within two days Richard Fetridge had started upon that mysterious month's absence about which we were curious a while ago. You can easily understand now why he was so long gone. New Orleans and Montreal are a long distance apart, and the events which he wished to verify happened more than ten years ago."

"And what events do you suppose them to be?"

"There is no moral doubt about the matter. He was investigating the history of the junior partner of North & Stackhouse, the man whom you yourself once said to me had no past."

"The affair grows complicated," said Thomas.

"But I can dimly see a light ahead, I fancy. Go on."

"There is little more to be said. But that little is much. Richard Fetridge and Mme. Raymond reached Boston on the same day, June 14, Tuesday night.

"Until Thursday evening the woman remained in her room. That night she went out, and was brought home by Richard Fetridge—"

The detective hesitated.

"At what time?" demanded the reporter, eagerly.

"Well, sir," answered John Lamm impressively, "unless my landlady has misinformed me, it must have been about half an hour subsequent to the murder of Paul North."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MEDEA WEEPS!

A DOUBLE knock at the door interrupted the conference at this moment. John Lamm's assistant, admitted, whispered a few words in the detective's ear.

"Bring her in," said Lamm aloud. As the man passed out, the detective tipped Thomas a wink.

"It's my little amateur detective at North's," he murmured.

Immediately a spruce and bright-eyed brunette, very tastily dressed, crossed the threshold, with a bright smile for her employer; but when she saw Thomas she hesitated and drew back.

"Oh, it's all right. Don't be afraid. It's only my partner," said Lamm reassuringly. He introduced her to Mr. Thomas, closed the door, and gave her a chair.

"Don't be afraid to speak out," he said kindly. "You're among friends."

"I'm afraid all but to death," said the girl, who was evidently excited. "If this thing should ever come out about me! Not that I care for my present place. I'd have given notice last week if it hadn't been for you, Mr. Lamm."

"Now, don't go to worrying, my girl. Your services to the cause of justice will not only be rewarded here, but hereafter, as I have always told you. Now I see you have something to tell me. What is it?"

"Gracious!" exclaimed the girl, "I'm all in a fluster. Better ask me what it isn't. There's so much, I couldn't write it. I didn't dare to. I—I'm a thief. What do you think I've done? Stolen a letter."

The girl announced this with a half-triumphant, half-frightened air, and looked quickly from face to face, to see whether her conduct was considered exemplary.

"Oh, you're getting on," said Lamm, repressing a tendency to smile. "You'll be way up in the profession in a short time."

"I wouldn't have done it," said the girl, flashing a grateful glance toward her employer, "if it hadn't been for one thing. My brother John wrote me yesterday that he had got that nice place you promised me to get him. And them as remembers me, why, I remembers them."

And without further ado, the maid searched in the bosom of her dress, and produced an envelope.

"The lady went out last night, and while she was gone I went through her writing desk. I didn't have time to do all I'd liked to. I was too scared. But this was put all by itself in a little drawer, and I thought by the way it read it might be useful."

The detective took the letter with an indifferent

air ; but the moment he began to read it his face changed color. Actually, Thomas did not believe that John Lamm would betray so much agitation. But his own turn was coming. Without a word of comment, Mr. Lamm thrust the open letter into his friend's hand.

And this was what Thomas saw :

"BOSTON, *June* 16, 1887.

"MY DEAR MADAM.—Mr. Richard Fetridge and Mr. North, your father, are to have secretly a conference at the Boston House, Marlboro Street, after dinner to-night. The subject to be discussed is your husband. They will try to keep from you the object. If, now, you are a wise woman, and value your reputation and your happiness in the future, you will not hesitate to secrete yourself in that house to them unknown, before seven o'clock. You may then hear all, and govern yourself therewith. Breathe a word of this confidential communication to anybody, and all your chances you will destroy of knowing that you are deceived, outraged, shamefully victimized, by those who should protect you best.

Believe me a woman, dear madam, who sympathizes with you, and your

"FRIEND AND WELL WISHER."

Without a word Thomas hastened to open his pocket-book, and to produce a second letter, which had been loaned him by Inspector Applebee for publication in the *Globe*. It was the anonymous missive denouncing Albert Runyon to Paul North.

Thomas laid the two epistles side by side and triumphantly thrust them under Mr. Lamm's eyes with a single comment :

"The handwriting !"

Indisputable fact. The same person had written both letters.

"Well! well! well!" murmured John Lamm helplessly.

"Who's at the bottom of your conspiracy now?" Thomas whispered triumphantly. "Ah, my boy, you'll have to revise your facts to fit these circumstances."

The detective checked him with a warning look, and immediately addressed the maid:

"You say Mrs. Stackhouse went out last evening. Do you know why?"

"Well, you may be sure I do. If not, I can guess," returned the maid. "She spent all the afternoon trying to write a letter. She must have torn up a dozen, for the waste basket was half full of scraps. And she went to the post office and put it in with her own hand, for Moffett saw her."

"Indeed!" said Lamm; "and we, I suppose, have no means of knowing for whom that letter was meant?"

"Yes, indeed, we have," returned the maid, with an air of self-conscious shrewdness. "I happened to be in at the time she was going out. It was a big, square, cream-white envelope, such as she always writes on, and was written to Thornton Stackhouse, Adams House, Boston."

"Umph! And so she has at last answered him, Thomas," he whispered in his friend's ear; "we must have that letter or the ones that she didn't send. It may give us the whole story."

Thomas nodded.

"And this, I suppose, is all?" asked the detective, turning again to the young woman.

Mollie White shrugged her shoulders and actually tittered in her delight.

"Well, I guess not. Well, I guess not," she exclaimed, and enjoyed the huge anticipation and wonder to be read in the faces of the two men.

"Mollie, you're a jewel," said John Lamm, with genuine admiration. "If you keep on this way I'll get brother John's salary raised. Now, what is it?"

"Well, you see, sir, to begin with, Miss Harwood went out last evening to visit a friend of hers, and while she was gone Mrs. Marion had a visitor."

"Was this before or after the letter was written?"

"This was after it was written, but before it was posted, sir. He only stayed half an hour, and afterward she went right and carried the letter."

"By he, of course you mean 'the friend of the family,' Mr. Fetridge?"

The girl tossed her head with a contemptuous sniff.

"Friend of the family, indeed! Well, the family with him consists of one person, I can tell you; and that person don't scarcely be in a position to return his affections."

"Eh? Eh? What's this?" said Lamm. "Love-making!"

"No wonder you're surprised, Mr. Lamm, and she a married woman! Well, you may be sure I was; and if it wasn't for you I'd give my notice at once. Never till last night did I really suspect the baseness of such a monster; but then I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears."

"So you listened to their conversation, did you?"

"And what harm? If it was me they suspected of thieving they'd have no hesitancy, ladies and gentlemen though they consider themselves to be. Before this, you see, I haven't a-dared to risk it on account of Miss Harwood, but last night, the old lady being out and nobody on the floor but myself, I just quietly sidled up to the portière and peeked in. You see, it was warm and the light in the hall hadn't been turned on, and it was so dark you could scarcely see your hand, but the glass doors leading from the parlor to the veranda were opened, and the missis and her fine gentleman were sitting full in the stream of moonlight."

"Umha! How interesting you are, Miss White! Describe their attitudes as near as you can remember."

"Well, sir, she was fidgety and drawn away; but he was tender and kept coming nearer on the sofa. 'You know what the obstacles are,' says she. 'And if there were no obstacles?' says he. 'Oh, Richard, I am a very wretched woman!' says she, which was true enough in all conscience. She kept tapping her foot on the carpet, with her face turned

away from him, and he getting nearer and bolder all the time, and finally he caught her hand. 'You are making yourself miserable, Marion,' says he. But she pulled herself away and got up and nearly froze him with her look. 'You forget, sir!' says she. 'Everything but my mad love for you, yes,' says he. And as he was getting on his knees she put out her hands in front of her as if to ward him off, and says, 'Oh, Richard! Richard! Am I not wretched enough already without your making me worse?' But I guess he thought not, for he kept on making her a great deal worse."

"And as I understand it," said the detective, "she was not so tremendously angry, after all?"

"Well, not what I call angry," returned the parlor maid promptly. "If it had been me, and me a married woman, I'd have knocked him down; but she only seemed to get on her guard to keep him just so far and no nearer. But then, you know, she says she aint married, and I suppose if she's got that notion it makes a difference. 'And ah, Richard!' she says, 'when I think of what we two have lost because of our own miserable folly'—I can swear to them words miserable folly—says she, 'when I think of it I almost go mad. I have punished myself by a year of torment and a wasted, ruined life, and you—' And then she covered her face with her hands and began to cry."

"What! Marion Stackhouse! Cry! Impossible!" exclaimed the detective.

"Cry!" echoed the parlor maid. "And why

not? I've seen the tears come into her eyes for very spite. Oh, I guess you don't know that woman. She can cuddle up and be as cunning as a kitten if she wants to. Well, she was very melancholy then, and sat down and cried for a long time, and he tried to console her, and she kept saying it was 'useless,' to 'leave her alone,' to have 'pity on her'—and that sort. And says he, 'But what's the harm, Marion, after all, since you know the truth and I know it, why can't we go a long way from here and be happy yet?' But she wouldn't hear of it. 'No,' she says, 'there's no happiness for me anywhere,' and I guess that's true enough too, for she's not the kind that would ever be happy if she had the run of everything. 'Oh,' she says, 'you don't know me, Richard Fetridge, or you'd repulse me, instead of sitting beside me.'"

"Did she say that? Are you sure?" broke in Thomas.

"That, or something awfully near it, sir. I'm not taking my oath to every word; but I'll take my chances on getting the sense out of a thing once I hear it good. 'I know you, Marion,' says he, 'very well. You're reckless, and impulsive, and proud, but you mean to do right. You have carried your pride before this to the brink of ruining your own happiness and making a wreck of my life, but I'll answer for your meaning to do your duty.' And she says to him, 'What you call my pride, Richard Fetridge, is the evil in me. Do you know, I sometimes believe my mother—' and there she

stopped and said, 'At times I feel as if I was possessed of the devil.' And I thought to myself, others in your service have thought so besides you, young lady. But the way she said it, I can tell you, gentlemen, half beneath her breath, was enough to give one the creeps. It even seemed to scare him for the minute. And then he tried to cheer her up, and she began to go on about her sister Stella, and to say she believed she'd been the death of that girl. And right in the middle of it she had regular hysterics, and she just sat on the sofa and wrung her hands and screams out, 'Oh, I'm wicked! wicked! wicked! I'd give my life to undo what I have done! Oh, will nothing come to my relief? Oh, I'm dying by inches!"

Thomas and Lamm exchanged puzzled and startled glances.

"There is no question," said the detective in a low voice, "that Marion accused herself in such language?"

"Not the faintest," said Miss White positively. "That part of it is quite certain. She cried it out so loud it's a wonder folk in the street didn't hear her. And then he grasps her hand and says, 'Come Marion; you must no longer keep me in the dark. You must tell me everything—even if it does criminate he whom the world calls your husband.'"

"No!" interrupted both men at once. "He didn't say that, did he?"

"He used them words," said Miss White, with a

positiveness that set at defiance both doubt and syntax. "'And he was very particular about it too. I can tell you, I had both my ears wide open about that time. And she didn't seem to hear him, but kept right on. 'And, oh! Richard,' she said, 'do you suppose anything, any provocation, the worst treatment you can imagine a person to have received at another person's hands would justify a mean and cowardly crime?' And with that he starts away from her, and she shrieks out, 'Oh, for pity's sake, don't cast me off! I am tortured beyond bearing!' 'Confess,' he says, and she threw her arms right around his neck and whispered in his ear. And just at that moment I was nearly frightened to death by hearing the latch lock. I knew if I stayed I'd be caught the next minute, and so I ran. It was Miss Harwood, and I was none too soon, either, for she lit the hall."

"Confound Miss Harwood!" said the detective heartily. "She has spoiled everything for us."

"Yes; and for them too," said the parlor maid. "For Mr. Fetridge did not stay five minutes after she came."

"Did you see him when he went? How did he act?" Lamm hastened to ask.

"Just as usual; only a bit excited. I'm sure of one thing, sir. Whatever she whispered to him, it didn't set him against her, for if he didn't squeeze her hand and look into her eyes the way he had no business to when he left her—then I'm no judge of such things."

The rest of that which the parlor maid had to tell was merely accumulative and corroboratory of what she had already told. Mr. Lamm satisfied himself of this fact by a cross-examination, interspersed with sly compliments, and sent the wide-awake Molly White away at last, well pleased with herself, to resume, with increased vigilance, her watch of Marion Stackhouse.

"And now," said the detective, hastily turning to Thomas as soon as they were alone, "it remains for us to find out what Mrs. Marion has written, and meant to write, to her husband. I must say it is a very unpromising task, but it is so important that it must be attempted."

"Very well," said Thomas, "if you'll attend to the letters which she destroyed, I'll turn my attention to the one she mailed. It is but eleven o'clock, and I doubt whether Stackhouse has received it yet."

"You had better be in a hurry, then."

"I am going," said Thomas; "but before I go I want to know what you think. Is your conviction still that a conspiracy existed, and that Marion North was the brains of it?"

"A hasty judgment is liable to recall," returned the detective; "but I must confess that I still believe in the conspiracy. But I bow to the facts in the case, Thomas; and Marion North from being the schemer becomes the tool. It is plain that the excitable and emotional nature of that remarkable woman at Swampscott has been played

upon to carry out the vengeance of this jealous creole. How I do not know; nor why. But that it was Marion's hand, not her will, that killed Paul North now I think becomes apparent. Don't you?"

"No," said the reporter decidedly. "No; I do not. I do not believe she had anything to do with it."

"Why?"

"Because I don't."

John Lamm laughed.

"I could give a better reason than that for your reluctance to accept the evidence," he said. "But never mind. By the way, I want to tell you something that will make you smile. Where I got it don't matter; but, as you know, I've got a friend or two in Pemberton Square, and Applebee isn't always so close-mouthed as he ought to be. Do you know what has made our illustrious friends so anxious to get their hands on Stella North?"

"I had supposed because she ran away."

"Oh, yes; but they previously suspected her."

"And in the name of goodness, why?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Thomas. It's a good joke on our friend Applebee. It seems he found a handkerchief on the stairs in the North house the day the murder was discovered."

"It is news to me."

"So I supposed. Well, it was impregnated with a peculiar perfume. 'Aha!' cries our friend Applebee; 'this is most important! I'll take it to a

chemist, find out what it is, and then I'll go smelling about the community till I light on it, and then—' Sort of a French detective sleuthhound kind of an affair, you know, such as Applebee would be likely to conceive."

"I'm afraid you show your prejudice against the department there, Lamm. But never mind the details. What was the outcome of it?"

"The outcome," said Lamm, with a quiet laugh, "was that Applebee found the scent on Stella North, and the whole department, without further investigation, with their accustomed lightning-like celerity jumped to the conclusion that Stella North was the guilty party."

"Humph!" ejaculated the reporter; "they couldn't have gone very far if they did not discover that the two girls used the same perfume. I found that out on my first visit."

"Umha! Applebee wasn't so lucky. The handkerchief was Marion's, of course. But a little mistake like that doesn't count with the department, I suppose. All in the family. But, joking aside, Thomas, the fact has a most serious side too."

"You think so."

"Another nail in the coffin of that splendid woman at Swampscott. Thomas, I'm sorry for her. I really am. I admire her too much not to pity her."

"Indeed!" replied the reporter, biting his mustache viciously. "Your conduct hardly seems to bear out your statement. To my mind, you show a feverish anxiety to convict her of a crime that is

utterly impossible for a woman of her nature to commit."

"Impossible?"

"Impossible!"

"Even in a moment of passion?"

"She would have been the first to convict herself, to give herself up, when the passion was over."

"Even, we will say, in a struggle to prevent suicide—even by *accident*, if you please?"

"Do not imagine for a moment that she would have concealed her part in the crime, Lamm. I tell you the more I study this woman's nature through her sister Stella the more I am convinced that she worshiped the very ground Paul North trod upon. If she were guilty, even in the most indirect manner, of bringing about his death, the world would have known of the fatality that night."

Lamm sighed and shook his head.

"I hate to destroy your confidence in Stella North's sister, Thomas, but I should not be doing my duty by you as a friend if I kept back what little I know of the matter. Let me ask you one question. Do you believe in hereditary vices.

"To some extent. Why?"

Without replying immediately in words, the detective unlocked his desk and afterward a small drawer in the upper part of it, whence he extracted a folded document of legal aspect.

"I have borrowed this from a friend who is an officer in a certain charitable institution," said Lamm. "I will simply read you the caption of it.

'Death-bed confession of Mary Anne Loveland, in which she avers that she was the mother of the abandoned infant afterward known as Hattie Maynard, who entered the Temperance Home on March 3, 1863.' I will simply add for your information, Kingman, that Mary Anne Loveland was the notorious character who served her term in prison for complicity in a capital offence and that Hattie Maynard is now Marion Stackhouse."

Thomas made a gesture as if to take the paper; but Lamm hastened to put it under lock and key again.

"You need not be afraid," he said, "that this document will ever see the light of day. I have given my word of honor to the friend who furnished me with it not to let it pass out of my possession. The secret is safe; but, I want to prepare your mind for the crushing exposure of this unfortunate woman which is coming as sure as fate."

"If she is guilty," said Thomas moodily, "let it come. I will put no block in the way of justice. But poor Stella will die of shame," he added mentally. And the reflection was followed by a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DRAWING THE NET.

AND now Reporter Thomas was making a determined though apparently hopeless effort to obtain possession of the letter which Marion Stackhouse had written to her husband. Not only hopeless the quest seemed, but dangerous. In the ordinary routine of his duties he would hesitatingly have rejected an enterprise of so obnoxious and disagreeable a nature. But the case was becoming desperate and it was no longer a business, no longer even a personal interest. The mournful pleading of the big blue eyes of Stella North nerved him for the ignoble task. The remembrance of some tears which he had seen that morning trembling on the long lashes stimulated him to unprecedented effort. He was in that mood where to obtain success he would stop at nothing short of crime. He hardly knew himself in this new *rôle;* but he played the spy and the sneak that day as he never played it before or since.

It was easy enough to assure himself of the existence of the letter.

Fifteen minutes after holding conference with Detective Lamm at the latter's office, Kingman

Thomas was walking boldly to the desk at the Adams House.

"Good-morning," said the clerk, for it was not yet noon of this eventful Saturday.

"Good-morning," said Thomas. "Can you tell me whether Mr. Stackhouse is in the hotel?"

"Not in his room," returned the clerk, with a queer smile. "His key is here."

"Curious!" said Thomas, with an assumption of troubled reflection. "I wonder if he's got my letter. I wrote him a letter last night and posted it at Swampscott," he continued by way of explanation. "Can you tell me whether he has it yet?"

The clerk took a look in the pigeon hole marked "S" and Thomas caught a momentary glimpse of a square, white envelope in his hand. But the clerk cast it back immediately and turned to the reporter.

"There is a letter for him here with the Swampscott postmark," he said. "It may be yours."

"A square, cream white envelope?" queried Thomas, "that looks like a piece of woman's stationery?"

"Yes."

"Ah, that's the one! He hasn't got it. Thank you."

"Are you going to wait and see him?" the clerk inquired, with another smile.

"Why?" asked Thomas, scenting something unusual.

"Only there are a dozen or so ahead of you: that's all. I thought I'd let you know."

"Indeed! And where are they all?"

"Oh, waiting about here."

"Business men?"

"Well, they have that look. Since the failure Mr. Stackhouse seems to have been considerably in demand."

"Oh, I see."

"Consequently, if it's anything important you'd do well to hunt him up, as this letter is likely to be here some time."

Thomas thanked his informant. As he turned away from the desk a daring subterfuge by which he might obtain possession of the letter came into his mind, but he dismissed it with impatient horror.

"What am I thinking of?" he exclaimed mentally. "Forgery! Tampering with the mail! I must season my impetuosity with a little reason."

He sauntered out as far as the doorway, and stood there in a brown study.

"No, there is nothing for me to do," he thought, "but to wait here for the man to claim his letter, however long that may be. I must trust to luck and a determined effort to get me a glance at it after he has read it."

The warning of the clerk made the outcome look dubious. These men waiting about here must be creditors or business associates who had pressing reasons to see Stackhouse. The clerk's significant air had insinuated that the junior partner was avoiding them. He was not then to be found at the office of North & Stackhouse? Evidently not,

or these men would not come here to wait for him. Nevertheless if his wife had sent the letter thither, it must be because he had directed her to do so. If he deemed it a matter of so much importance, as John Lamm imagined, would he not find some way of obtaining his mail without calling?

It was at the precise moment when this thought was taking form in the reporter's mind that he observed a district messenger boy leaving the office. The boy was just putting his hat upon his head, and Thomas caught a fleeting glimpse of a square, white envelope.

In an instant he comprehended what must have taken place since he had left the desk. Thornton Stackhouse had sent a requisition to the clerk for his mail. A word at the desk confirmed the reporter's suspicions, and in another minute he was upon the heels of the messenger. His task at present seemed simplicity itself. To follow this messenger boy till he was finally led into the presence of the man whose commission he executed was a task that certainly called for none of the higher expedients of Mr. Thomas's genius.

The boy took a course southward and continued straight up Washington Street until he reached Union Park Street, when he turned short to the right, and a few minutes afterward entered the door of a drinking saloon in Shawmut Avenue. Thomas had no special associations with the place, though he knew of it in a general way. Taking the precaution not to enter it immediately and thus give

anybody who might be on the watch an idea that there was anything other than a coincidence in his arrival on the heels of the messenger boy, Thomas loitered into the place and passed directly into the bar, where he called for a drink. There were two or three men standing at the bar, but at the moment of his entrance nothing was to be seen either of the messenger or of Thornton Stackhouse. A number of booths ranged along the side of the room opposite the bar, however, attracted his attention, and, in accordance with his surmises, Mr. Thomas was pleased very shortly to see the messenger emerge from one of these places. The boy had scarcely passed out when the reporter, swallowing at a gulp the beverage which he had ordered, placed the payment therefor upon the counter, and lounged down past the compartment from which the boy had issued.

His expectations were entirely correct. There sat Thornton Stackhouse reading—devouring would be a more accurate word— the letter which had been posted at Swampscott the night before. Fearful of attracting attention, Thomas increased his pace, but precautions were needless. The man was absorbed, completely oblivious to all his surroundings. Even in the momentary glimpse he had of him the reporter was startled into the belief that the contents of the letter had utterly overwhelmed and dazed the man who had received it. The paper was crumpled fiercely between his hands, and he was glaring at it with scarcely the look of sanity in his eyes.

Thomas slipped hastily into the next booth. The brief vision which had just been granted him was certainly not calculated to lessen his idea of the importance of the document of which he was in quest, or to shake his determination to become possessed of it.

But how?

This was a problem which might well puzzle Mr. Thomas. The greater the importance of the letter the more carefully would its possessor guard it. If he destroyed it, there was little hope that so shrewd a man as Stackhouse would be satisfied with leaving it in a condition which would not preclude its restoration. If he carried it away with him, under what possible pretence could the reporter get it? He certainly could not ask him for it: he was scarcely prepared even in his present fever of eagerness to resort to violence. Were he so inclined, how could he even hope for the opportunity of stealing it? Nevertheless, Thomas compressed his lips and waited patiently the unpredictable course of events.

He had not long to wait for a change in the situation. He heard Stackhouse crushing the paper and murmuring undistinguishable words below his breath. Then again, he fancied, from the sounds, that the man had risen to his feet and was leaving the booth. A cautious reconnoitring assured the reporter that he was correct in this surmise. Stackhouse had passed to the bar, and he heard him in no very steady voice asking for brandy. Where

was the letter? Actuated by an absurd hope, the reporter slipped into the booth which Stackhouse had just vacated. A minute's search assured him that Stackhouse had not committed the unpardonable indiscretion of leaving even the remnants of the document upon the floor. Undoubtedly he had not torn it up, but had replaced it bodily in his pocket.

After drinking the brandy, Stackhouse went out, and the reporter followed him from the saloon. Thomas was not, however, so absorbed in the actions of his intended victim that he was oblivious to other things. It was quite obvious to him that two of the men who had been lounging at the bar suddenly became alert and lost all interest in the place as soon as Stackhouse had left it. So eager were they to get into the street that they jostled Mr. Thomas on their way. They were ordinary-looking men. Nothing about them was calculated to linger in the memory or to attract a second glance. One of them sauntered over to the other side of the street. The other kept along just in front of Thomas.

The reporter frowned. These details were no enigma to him. He recognized at once the precautionary measures of the police department. These, then, were Thomas Stackhouse's constant companions, and the reporter realized that their presence made his quest, if not more dangerous, at least vastly more difficult.

Still he went on. The detectives followed Stack-

house. Thomas followed the detectives. Did Stackhouse know of his double espionage? There were no evidences that he did or that he cared one way or the other. He went forward at a good pace, his eyes always downward or straight ahead. What a walk he was leading them! Apparently he had forgotten that there were any means of conveyance about the city. Ignoring alike horse cars and cabs, Thorton Stackhouse went from the barroom in Shawmut Avenue to the Chelsea Ferry, at the foot of Hanover Street. The four men, who were not all conscious of their association of interest, passed upon the ferry-boat together.

After the boat was out in the stream, for the first time Stackhouse's conduct became suspicious. He glanced about him, and wandered from point to point, apparently with two objects in view. He seemed to be trying to get as far as possible from other people, and as near as possible to the rail.

A dark suspicion entered the reporter's mind. Was Thornton Stackhouse contemplating suicide? Whether or not, it was not at all necessary for him to interfere. Circumstances happily enabled him to watch the proceedings from a safe distance, for the two detectives, doubtless imbued with the same suspicion which had occurred to Thomas, kept close upon the heels of the unfortunate man. Evidently they had no intention of permitting their prey to escape them, even through the medium of violent death. Justice inexorably endeavors to close even this door of refuge to the victims whom she proposes to sacrifice.

Stackhouse once lost his temper. He turned hotly upon one of his tormentors.

"Come, sir!" he said, in a voice of suppressed passion. "End this farce. If my safety is so important to you, arrest me and have done with it!"

The man regarded him with a cold stare.

"Excuse me, sir," he said gruffly. "I don't know you."

The officer shrugged his shoulders, and turned indifferently to a view of the landscape. Stackhouse bit his lip; his anger vanished; he became moody. His eyes were cast down, and he no longer looked about him.

When the ferry-boat reached the other side, the ruined banker disembarked, and for a time wandered aimlessly about the water front. His hands were clasped behind him and his head hung down. He walked like an old man.

With the same outward bearing he took a ferry-boat back to the city, and set out once more upon one of his interminable walks. There was a new feature added to his conduct. At nearly every drinking saloon he stopped and ordered liquor. His walk became unsteady, but he went on like a man who had a definite end in view. The frequent visits to the saloons puzzled Thomas at first. Suddenly he had an inspiration.

"The letter from his wife was a terrible blow to him. He seeks oblivion. This is his second effort to obtain it. The first was death, and it was denied him. The second, though temporary, is quite as

effective, and will be secured when he has imbibed a sufficient quantity of alcohol!"

Thomas began to have a vague hope. His suspicions became certainty very soon. Thornton Stackhouse entered at last a third-class hotel at the North End, and paid for a room. The call boy came down after a few minutes for a bottle of brandy, and Stackhouse locked himself in the room with it.

Even the experienced Thomas shuddered. That a man who had occupied the position in the world of the late junior partner of North & Stackhouse should be reduced to an extremity of this kind, filled him with a feeling akin to pity. But nothing shook his resolution. Whether it tended to save this miserable exile from respectability or to give him the final kick which should destroy his last hold of the bushes on the brink of the precipice, the bit of evidence now in Stackhouse's possession must be secured.

A private word or two in the ear of the proprietor secured the reporter a room on the second floor, immediately adjoining that occupied by the man in whom all his interest centered. There was a communicating door, but it was locked on the other side. Against this door the reporter remained listening, conjecturing, planning, for quite two hours. The audible evidences of Stackhouse's presence had for some time ceased. Thomas realized that it was time to act.

He began a great clamor upon the door. There

was not a sound in answer. Thomas left his room, and sought out the proprietor.

"You know me, don't you—Thomas, of the *Globe?* Ah! Well, I want to save you trouble. There is every reason to believe that that man in the room next to mine has made away with himself."

"No!" exclaimed the proprietor, aghast.

"Quite so, sir. I have suspected him for some time. I can account for the sounds I have heard in no other manner. They suddenly ceased, and for some time I have been making noise enough to raise the dead. He doesn't respond."

Within four minutes the door of Mr. Stackhouse's room was forced, and half a dozen men rushed into the chamber. Stackhouse lay upon the bed, motionless. His coat and vest were thrown carelessly ever the chair.

"He is drunk!" cried one of the detectives.

"He is dying," said Thomas. "Where are his papers? We must have his name."

With admirable coolness before them all, Thomas took a pocket-book from the coat which lay upon the chair, and was proceeding to investigate its contents.

An authoritative hand was suddenly laid upon his shoulder, and one of the detectives whispered in his ear:

"Are you crazy, Thomas? What is the matter with you? You know well enough who the man is. None of your tricks, please. Put back that pocket-book."

The reporter had a faint flush in his cheeks, but he yielded without protest.

The square white envelope was already in his possession.

An hour later he read the letter. Its contents filled him with astonishment and excitement. It was certainly not what he expected, but it seemed to him pregnant with possibilities. He hastened to find John Lamm ; but the office of the detective was closed, and he was unable to locate him.

" It's fate ! " cried Thomas. " I shall act alone, and, fortune helping me, I shall save Stella North and her sister Marion ! "

And that Saturday evening he took the train for Swampscott.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"NAME THE MAN."

MONDAY morning, eleven days exactly from that last and memorable meeting of the directors of the Nicaragua Midland, when Paul North's coming was awaited in vain, Thornton Stackhouse staggered into the office of Detective Lamm.

A few hours had wrought a great change in the man—a change for the worst. Careworn before, he was now absolutely haggard. But one look was needed to assure Mr. Lamm that his visitor had passed a sleepless, wretched night.

Unmistakable signs of debauch, too, were to be observed. His lips twitched strangely; the lines of his anxious face were more deeply drawn; an unhealthy, blotched redness had taken the place of once healthy color, and there was an incessant trembling of the hands, unusual and ominous.

Mr. Lamm, with a good deal of concern expressed in his look, sprang up to greet him, and assisted the man to a chair.

"Why, Mr. Stackhouse," he exclaimed, "you are not well. Why did you come down town this morning? You should have sent for me. You are in no condition to be out in the street on such

a warm day. Let me call a carriage. I will go down to your room at the Adams House and talk with you there, if you like."

Thornton Stackhouse shook his head and put out a trembling hand.

"No—no," he said huskily. "You are very good to think of it. Perhaps I should not have left my room. But the hotel is a horror to me, sir. I cannot set foot in the hall without meeting the scowling face of some creditor of North & Stackhouse. People point after me as I walk along, and talk under their breath about me. Fools! They think I do not see these things. I am followed here, there, and everywhere, hounded like an escaped convict. Saturday I lay down on a bed, and they broke open my room to make sure I had not escaped them! I thank you, Mr. Lamm, for all that you have done and meant to do for me. But I have made up my mind not to endure this life any longer. I am going away."

"Nonsense!" returned Mr. Lamm cheerfully, with his hand on the man's shoulder, but looking anxiously, none the less, into his haggard face. "Stick to your colors a little longer. The fight is almost over."

"Almost over!" Stackhouse echoed the words with a curious, dull intonation. "My hopes of happiness are wrecked. The future is dark—all dark. The shadow of crime, once it falls on a man's life, can never be lifted. You know how terribly true that is, Mr. Lamm. This is no more

than my just deserts. No more. Yes, I am going away. Whatever the risk I care not. Why should I stay in this city of torment?"

Mr. Lamm gave another friendly touch upon the shoulder of the dejected figure, but his own look of anxiety was only intensified.

"Wait!" said the detective, in tones of sympathy. "The truth is coming, and it is coming fast. You have trusted me so far. Don't cast my advice to the winds now."

"I do not care the turn of my hand whether the truth comes out to-day or to-morrow, or never," gloomily answered Stackhouse, looking at the face bent near his own, with hollow, despairing eyes. "I have no longer any interest in any possible event that may happen to me. But out of this horrible place and these horrible surroundings I mean to go, and without delay. Mr. Lamm, I thank you again for the noble way in which you have helped me."

"Don't speak of that," interposed Mr. Lamm.

"I must speak of it. In all my trouble and remorse I have not forgotten it. And now let me have your bill, Mr. Lamm, and I will draw my check for the amount at once—the last check that Thornton Stackhouse will ever fill out in Boston."

"My dear sir," Mr. Lamm remonstrated, "I have no bill to present. Why, my work is not done yet. When the proper time comes I shall not forget it, be sure of that," he added, with assumed lightness of manner.

Stackhouse got up rather unsteadily, but with a filled purpose in his look.

"Let me go into your inner office," he asked, "and make out a check if it's only as a matter of form. Besides, I want to write a moment on another matter, and I should like to be undisturbed by any chance caller you might have."

Mr. Lamm was at the door of his little "den" in a moment, opened his desk, and placed pen and paper at his visitor's disposal. Stackhouse sat down, and the detective went out, softly closing the door upon the client at his work.

Roused from certain regretful momentary meditations by the entrance of his trusted worker, "Bill," Mr. Lamm began to talk with him in an undertone.

In the very middle of their hushed conference, both men started, and looked wildly around.

The sound of an explosion came to their ears with terrible distinctness.

It was unmistakably a pistol shot.

Moved by a common impulse, both rushed toward the inner office. When Detective Lamm pushed open the door and went in, his subordinate was close behind.

The room was full of smoke. But the cloud lifted as the current of fresher air entered, and in an instant the two were staring into a face—a face that did not return their look of horror, the face of a dead man.

Dead! Sitting up in his chair at Mr. Lamm's

desk, with one hand clutching a pen, and in the other a revolver, from which a tiny wreath of smoke was curling, was the form of Thornton Stackhouse.

So true had been his aim that the transition from life to death could have taken scarcely a second of time. He had blown out his brains.

With a stifled cry Mr. Lamm's companion started back. His white face met at the outer door the frightened look of another man, a conveyancer, who had an office close by.

"A man has shot himself in there!" whispered Bill. The new comer hurried out of the room. Others, alarmed at the report of the pistol, were hurrying to the scene; and in an incredibly short space of time every occupant of the building seemed to be possessed of the startling news.

John Lamm quickly regained his accustomed composure, and barred the outer door in advance of the rush of the excited throng which he knew was coming.

He returned, a moment later, to the little room, paying not the slightest heed to the crush without, or to the loud and reiterated demands: "Let us in! Let us in!"

In the dead man's clenched hand, which Mr. Lamm made no attempt to unclasp, was held a 32-calibre revolver. The other hand held a pen.

Written on the blotter of the desk was this, the last message of Thornton Stackhouse:

"Send for my wife, Marion Stackhouse.

"Tell her my death is my reparation.

"I can forgive her if she can forgive me. But I cannot live without her."

Mr. Lamm read the words, and gave a look full of pity at the motionless figure sitting there—so near him, yet in an awful sense so far removed.

The stentorian demand at the outer door had ceased when he re-entered his main office, but there was a dull murmuring, which grew to a very babel of excited sound when Mr. Lamm's form was seen on the threshold.

Two men were standing close to the door, having apparently been given that post of distinction by common consent of the crowd, who held back a little way.

Mr. Lamm knew his men at once.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, "you are outwitted!"

They made a pretense of misunderstanding him.

"What do you mean?" said the older man.

"I mean," returned the detective quietly, "that you can inform your inspector that your services will be no longer necessary. The inner room, gentlemen."

He waved his hand for them to enter.

They hurried in. In another minute one of them came out, forced his way through the increasing throng which blocked the entrance, and hurried after Inspector Applebee.

Mr. Lamm turned gravely to his assistant.

"Go to Richard Fetridge's office," he said in a low tone, "and have him here at once. Don't explain. Don't listen to any excuses for delay."

The man pushed through the crowd and was off like a shot.

Both messengers were signally successful.

To the immense satisfaction of the breathless officer in citizen's clothes, he met Inspector Applebee coming down the street holding his course directly in the line taken by Mr. Lamm's messenger.

Two words, and the inspector hurried toward the scene of death, and found his way through the press. Mr. Lamm, waiting at the door, bowed and admitted him at once.

With Inspector Applebee and his man, a great surge of excited humanity rushed into Mr. Lamm's office. Only by dint of the most active exertions could the police keep back the eager crowd from the little room.

Presently there was a stir at the outer door. Attention was diverted for the moment from what the little room contained of animate or inanimate humanity, as Mr. Fetridge, visibly excited, entered the office under the guidance of Mr. Lamm's messenger.

Mr. Lamm, counting upon his speedy coming, was on the watch, and with the co-operation of Inspector Applebee, to whom the detective deferred as being the representative of authority, Richard Fetridge was admitted to the inner room.

"A horrible sight!" he murmured, putting his

hands before his face, and leaning against one of the officers. In a few moments he had recovered, but avoided, as much as he could, turning any glance toward the desk.

"Do you remember what Daniel Webster said once?" Fetridge spoke to Mr. Lamm under his breath, but not so low that the listening ear of Inspector Applebee did not catch every word: "'There is no refuge for the murderer but suicide. And suicide is confession!'"

Hardly was the sentence uttered, when Inspector Applebee, as if aroused by some sudden thought, ordered the officers to clear the outer room and to prevent further blockade upon the stairway.

"Not you, of course," said the inspector, addressing generally the little group.

No word was spoken by them while the orders were carried out, not without some difficulty. When the room was cleared at last, the inspector motioned to one of his men to remain by the body, and led the way into the larger room, Mr. Lamm and Mr. Fetridge following in turn.

Taking no note of the detective, Inspector Applebee wheeled upon his companion and clapped a firm hand on his arm.

"I am sorry to have to say it, Mr. Fetridge, but I must take you into custody."

Richard Fetridge stood aghast, unable to articulate a syllable.

Self-poised as ever, Mr. Lamm took his cue to speak.

"Inspector Applebee," he said very coolly, "it is not my business, perhaps, but you are sure that in arresting Mr. Fetridge you are not making a mistake?"

The inspector put on at once his invisible robe of official dignity.

"I think I know what I am about, Mr. Lamm." He was very curt.

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt, Mr. Inspector," responded the private detective.

"Of course, if you are possessed of any information, sir, the authorities will be glad to have you disclose it." Thus Inspector Applebee still, with his official manner emphasized.

"I do profess to some knowledge of this case, Mr. Inspector," returned Mr. Lamm, "and that is the reason why I made that suggestion just now about Mr. Fetridge here."

"Oh, we understand that this is a complicated affair," remarked Inspector Applebee. "We know very well that Richard Fetridge is not the only person in the case. It's not professional, perhaps, to tell you, Mr. Lamm, but it is a fact that headquarters have a man at Swampscott now, and another important arrest has already taken place. Mr. Fetridge, are you ready?"

"Another arrest!" he gasped. "In the name of Heaven, who is it? Who? Not that unfortunate sufferer at the North villa?"

The inspector replied to this wild, impetuous appeal in no other way than by a very grim smile.

Mr. Lamm had stepped aside, and Inspector Applebee had already hooked his arm firmly in Mr. Fetridge's when a great noise at the door attracted their attention.

Angry remonstrance and determined assertion were contending for the upper hand, when Mr. Lamm recognized, or thought he recognized, one of the voices.

"I must go in! I must, I say!"

It was Kingman F. Thomas who spoke the words, and there was no doubt about it. Dismissing all formality, Mr. Lamm hastened to the support of his ally, tried and true.

Inspector Applebee, still attached to Richard Fetridge in this peculiarly "professional" manner, had not made up his mind whether or not to rebuke Mr. Lamm for his precipitate action, when Kingman F. Thomas entered the room and joined the trio.

Breathless from his verbal and physical contest with the guardian of the portal—himself panting and angry enough—Thomas could not speak for a moment.

"Well, Thomas," said the inspector testily, "what is the matter with you?"

"Something will be the matter with you—in a minute—when I tell you what I know," gasped the reporter.

His manner was so unusual and excited that everybody began to have lively misapprehensions.

"What do you mean?" asked the inspector hastily. "Do you refer to the North case?"

"Most assuredly I do," cried Thomas. "I am in possession of all the facts. Lock the doors, gentlemen. Everything must stay just as it is till I have told my story."

"There is no time for stories," said Applebee. "If you are in possession of all the facts, you know who committed the murder. Tell us in a word. Who was it? Name the man."

There was a profound silence in the room as Kingman F. Thomas, at last himself again, opened his mouth for a reply.

CHAPTER XXV.

NOT WHAT THEY EXPECTED, BUT STILL—

"INSPECTOR," returned Thomas, in a voice that trembled in spite of his efforts to the contrary, "I give you the solemn word of a man who at least believes that he speaks the truth. There has been no murder!"

But for the excited breathing of the living in the office of John Lamm, detective, there was no more sound in the moment following this utterance than there would have been if Thomas's auditors had suddenly become so many ingenious and lifelike pieces of waxwork.

The inspector was the first to recover sufficient command of himself to trust his voice.

"Do you mean to have us believe that it was a suicide?" he demanded, with a scornful incredulity.

"I do not," Thomas returned decisively. "I mean to have you believe that Paul North died from *accident*, pure and simple, without the intervention of any second person in any possible way."

"And is this man," said the still incredulous inspector, with a toss of his head in Fetridge's direction, "supposed to have knowledge of this fact?"

"Me!" gasped Richard Fetridge. "I assure you, sir, that I haven't the faintest idea of what he is talking about."

"Umha! And the conspiracy?" murmured a reproachful voice close to the reporter's ear.

Thomas turned quickly to grasp Lamm's hand.

"My friend," he said solemnly, "I am sorry to say that you were quite right. There was a conspiracy. You were shrewdly speculating here one day as to which person was at the head of it and which person carried it out; but you fell wide of the truth there. Lamm, Paul North himself was at the head of that conspiracy, and that pitiable woman, his adopted daughter, was the misguided instrument of perpetuating his vengeance."

Among those who stared at Thomas there was certainly none whose face expressed more of bewilderment, dumb and hopeless, than Richard Fetridge.

Thomas observed this, but the sight seemed to kindle his indignation.

"And as for the cause of the whole thing," he said, "it is easily to be found in the man who entered into an intrigue with an adventuress for purposes of his own to completely ruin the husband of Paul North's daughter."

"For the cause of truth and justice," interposed Fetridge in a faint voice. "For the family honor and—and my own."

Thomas turned from him with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. And yet was he wholly

just in condemning this man, whose chief fault had been that he loved Marion North-Stackhouse too well to give her up so long as a chance remained of winning her? With what feverish eagerness Richard Fetridge must have seized upon the straw of hope which the revengeful Creole had brought into his office that fateful morning in May; and how he must have argued with his own conscience till he had justified his course to himself! But, then, allowance must be made for the frame of mind of Mr. Thomas, who was grievously dissatisfied with the outcome of the North case.

"And Thornton Stackhouse?" he asked. "To speak more plainly, perhaps, Albert Runyon. I was told that he was here."

"Thornton Stackhouse is dead," returned the inspector, impatiently. "He committed suicide this morning. We are wasting precious time, Mr. Thomas. If what you say is true, it is eminently important that I should be assured of it at once. Tell your story in the fewest possible words. In the first place, how did you become possessed of this information?"

"Dead!" murmured the reporter. He looked about him sharply and the truth seemed to come to to him. He pointed toward the inner room. "In there?"

Lamm nodded.

"What a coincidence!"

Everybody noticed that the reporter's lips had turned white. For a short time he seemed vainly trying to articulate.

The inspector, unaware of the cause of his agitation, again reminded him impatiently of the flight of time. Thomas drew himself together with an effort.

"Permit me to sit down," he said; and dropped at once into the nearest chair. He began to search in an inner pocket, and drew therefrom a folded document.

"All necessary information is contained here," he said, his voice gaining strength. "I have obtained it. It is my property, and I stipulate but one thing, inspector—I am to dictate just how much of it is to be given to the press. Just enough of it may be presented to satisfy the public. No more. There is scandal enough in this affair at the best, without heaping the whole truth upon the heads of the unfortunate family."

"You know yourself whether your request is reasonable," returned Applebee. "If it is, you know very well that I shall only be too glad to comply with it, if I can do so without placing my department in a false light before the public."

"This," continued Thomas, unfolding the document, "is the sworn statement of Marion North."

"You mean Mrs. Stackhouse?" the inspector said.

"I mean Marion North, sir. As to how I obtained it, I may say that it was partly by threat, partly by argument. I accidentally became possessed on Saturday of the cause of her separation from Thornton Stackhouse. The information I

found in a letter written by her to him. I found her in the last agonies of a determined conflict between her pride and a sense of justice, which I am sure would eventually have ended in the surrender of pride, even without my intervention. At first she fought me off with all her strength, but I was fortunately possessed of a stronger argument than anybody else could have brought to bear upon her in the person of her sister."

"You!" cried the inspector.

"I," returned the reporter. "Exactly, my friend. The lady is a particular friend of my mother, and has been stopping with her for the week past. I took Stella North to Swampscott with me yesterday afternoon. I obtained a full confession last night. But I was obliged to wait till morning for a justice of the peace to prepare it in proper form. Permit me, gentlemen, if this explanation of how I came by the document is sufficiently explicit, to read it to you."

"Read it," commanded the inspector, briefly.

"SWAMPSCOTT, *June* 27, 1887.

"About noon of the 16th of June last, I received an anonymous letter, which has since been stolen from my writing-desk, warning me that an affair of great importance to my happiness was to be discussed at my father's house in Marlboro Street that evening, and advising me, if I valued my future happiness, to be secretly present and overhear the conversation.

"I had previously become suspicious that everything was not right about the affairs of my father and the man whom I considered my husband; and

I could see no harm to result from this means of obtaining information. I entrusted nobody with the contents of that letter, but, resolved to accept the advice therein contained, I took my keys to the house in Marlboro Street, and late in the afternoon of Thursday went to Boston.

"I reached the house before seven o'clock, and let myself in by the front door. A little more than half an hour later I heard the noise of the latch key. I was then on the stairs, near the floor above, and when the door opened I very plainly heard the voices of my father and Mr. Richard Fetridge.

"'I am very sure,' said my father, 'that Thornton is here. Or else he has been here and forgotten to lock the storm door when he went out.'

"'We must know before we begin business,' returned Mr. Fetridge. 'I agreed to this place, you know, because there seemed to be absolutely no danger of our being overheard or interrupted. And Stackhouse is the very man of all others whom I wished to avoid. Is there no possibility that he has been warned of this conference?'

"'None,' returned my father. 'I give you my word of honor, Mr. Fetridge, that I have not mentioned a syllable of this affair to a living soul.'

"And then I heard them coming upstairs. I understood from what they said that they intended to search the house. I ran up as lightly as I could and locked myself into a clothes-press in my own room. They afterward came to the door of my room, but evidently had already concluded that there was no intruder in the house.

"When I was sure that they had gone down again, I stole from the room, and took up a position on the stairs between the second and third floors. I did not dare to go any nearer, but as they were in the library, the door of which was open, I could hear plainly everything that was said.

"I soon distinguished a woman's voice, and realized that she had been admitted to this mysterious 'conference' between Richard Fetridge and my father. This was the woman, I did not doubt, who had sent me the anonymous letter, for I did not see how anybody else could be aware of the appointment at this house."

Richard Fetridge interrupted the reading at this point by breaking a paper ruler which he had been convulsively twisting in his hands as if he fancied his fingers were about the throat of the treacherous Marie.

"Curse the woman!" he cried. "Curse her! curse her! She sacrificed me to gratify her own cunning instinct of revenge. She betrayed my confidence. She was not satisfied with what I promised her. If I had known that night that she had dared to do it!"

"Humph!" said Thomas. "If a man enters into an alliance with such a woman, what can he expect?"

Fetridge buried his face in his hands and did not reply. The reading continued:

"I soon learned who she was and why she was here, and what Richard Fetridge had to say that he was afraid Thornton Stackhouse might overhear. The woman's name was stated as Marie Moissot, though it was admitted that she was now living under an *alias*. It appeared from the conversation that she had accidentally discovered the identity of Thornton Stackhouse with the Albert Runyon for whom she had long been searching, some weeks before, and had only been prevented from creating a scandal by the intervention of Richard Fetridge, who had pacified her by agreeing to effectually

ruin him, if she would consent to forego the malicious pleasure of involving the family in the disgrace of a public scandal.

"In this paper, which I design to be a simple statement of facts, I do not wish to parade my own sufferings or emotions. But it is necessary to say that I had never loved my husband ; that I had married only because I became engaged to him in a moment of foolish pique, and my pride was too great to admit of my breaking that engagement. This imperious passion, which had already wrecked my happiness, was the hateful thing that was wounded, outraged, stung to fury by the revelations which I now overheard. I saw that Marie Moissot, with the natural suspicions of an unscrupulous person, mistrusted Mr. Fetridge's intention, perhaps his ability, to hasten the complete downfall of Thornton Stackhouse, and had, therefore, written to me. It is only of late that I have thoroughly realized how maliciously shrewd she was in assuring herself that I should become acquainted with the facts.

"And these are the revelations that made my ears tingle, my heart beat like a trip-hammer, and my finger-nails to indent themselves into the palms of my hands ; that filled me for the time with the instincts of the murderess, and made my blood boil with indignant hatred. Thornton Stackhouse was the assumed name of an adventurer, Albert Runyon, whose legal wife and children were still living in New Orleans, who had deserted them to go with Marie Moissot, a fascinating Creole, at that time but sixteen years old, to Montreal, only to desert her in turn, and to come at last to ME !

" This was the man for whom I had wrecked my life, broken two hearts, and sealed the warrant of my everlasting degradation !

" There is no room for denial ; no chance for

doubts. Everything that was presented to my father was in the form of documents, written evidence, sworn to and duly witnessed. Richard Fetridge is a lawyer, and he had spent a month in verifying Marie Moissot's story.

"Neither was there any room to doubt that Albert Runyon in marrying me understood fully to what position he was reducing me; for the evidence showed that he continued even to this date to send his wife a monthly allowance for her support.

"And the monster's excuse for all this villainy was that he did not love his wife, but loved me! As if a man who loved a woman could so cruelly, heartlessly deceive her!

"But this is not all. Thornton Stackhouse had not been honest in his dealings with my father. The documents revealed a course of systematic treachery which if carried out would have ruined my father and enriched him. To be sure, all these transactions were of older date, and since his mock marriage with me there was no evidence that he had continued them. In other words, he had kindly consented to cease cheating Mr. North in consideration of having married his daughter. Did these circumstances palliate his offense any in my eyes? As well ask a drowning person if he is mindful of the subtraction or addition of a drop or two of the element that is killing him.

"There have been times in my life when I have been frightened at the intensity of some sudden evil passion within me—something that is so contrary to my teaching and education, and arises so spontaneously that I have been led to regard such things as an inheritance from my unknown parents. And this night as I stood on the stairs listening, a passion of hatred took possession of me, which I can compare to nothing but a great sea of molten metal in a smelting furnace, white, hot and hissing

like a serpent if it comes in contact with any cooler surface.

"My father was scarcely less overcome than I was. He was violent and wretched by turns. Mr. Stackhouse had been a peculiar element in his life. The man had had an influence over him such as no one else had ever gained. Now, for the first time he was shown the real character of the man he had trusted.

"Even through all the turbulence of my own emotions I understood the intensity of my father's feelings. He was a man of impulsive and quick temper. He never preserved a hatred; but for that very reason it lived all the fiercer at the moment of its birth. His own rage at this instant was little short of mine.

"'Villain! Scoundrel! Harpy!' I heard him mutter from time to time, and then he would burst out into violent imprecations that would have terrified me had I been in a mood to fear anything.

"When he had submitted his evidence, Mr. Fetridge suggested the action which he asked my father to take. He said that he had done all that he had done for the family honor and for my honor. That if it had not been for his opportune intervention Marie Moissot would have made the bigamy of Albert Runyon a public scandal. He reminded my father that I was no more the wife of this scoundrel than as if that sacrilege of a ceremony had never been performed. There were, therefore, no legal ties to be severed. Mr. North must act in the matter as if he had become possessed of his information through any source but the real one. Richard Fetridge's part in the affair was never to be known; not even to me. But I was to learn the truth from my father's lips. So was Albert Runyon. My father was to go to him; give him twenty-four hours to leave the country after signing a damaging

document which Mr. Fetridge had prepared. In course of time it was suggested that I might quietly obtain a divorce on the ground of desertion. In case this programme was carried out, Mr. Fetridge proposed to help my father out of his financial difficulties. Otherwise he could withdraw his support.

"When the arrangements had been completed, Mr. Fetridge went away with the woman, and my father, who proposed to sleep in the house that night and to meet Mr. Fetridge early in the morning, after seeing them to the door, returned to his library.

"I awoke gradually out of my long trance, and went down to the library door. I did not propose to conceal the fact of my presence from my father. The conference between us was not to be delayed. It must take place to-night.

"He was so engrossed that he did not hear my footsteps. I was startled when I saw what his occupation was. He was loading his pistol. I was not in a condition to measure accurately the flight of time, but I must have lingered on the staircase some minutes after his return to the library, for, as I afterwards discovered, he had quite finished his task when I interrupted him. He had taken out his box of cartridges from a drawer of his writing-desk, which still stood open.

"'Father!' I called to him. 'Father!'

"He uttered an exclamation of horror, repulsed the pistol, as if endeavoring to conceal it, and turned toward me. He whispered my name, and took a step or two hastily toward me.

"At the same time I uttered a cry of warning, for I saw the pistol topple over by its own weight. Slowly at first and then with a quick dash, it slid from a mass of papers upon which it had been placed, dropped from the edge, turned completely

over, and was caught in the corner of the open drawer. My cry was drowned by the simultaneous report. Mr. North threw up his hands, rushed forward with an awful look in his face, and fell at my feet.

"I vaguely remember hearing him speak my name and murmur something about my husband. But this sudden, unexpected climax to the unutterable horrors of that night gave me a temporary relief to my suffering. I could bear no more. I have a dim remembrance of putting out my hands to save myself from falling.

"I have no means of knowing how long I lay upon the floor. When I awoke I saw my father lying motionless by the door, with that horrible dripping scrawl which I knew had been made by his own blood upon the wall. I called to him, I seized his hand, but I soon saw that he was quite dead.

"The sight of the blood did not terrify me. I am ashamed to confess it, and I cannot explain it, but it filled me temporarily with a strange, wild, savage exultation. I know now that I must have been crazy. Emotional insanity, the physicians call it. God knows how I honored and loved the man who had been a father to me. I am told they suspected me of having killed him. Heaven knows I am wicked enough; but not that crime—no, not that!

"Let me pass over the next fifteen minutes. They will be a terror to me as long as memory remains to me. When I became calmer, I tried to realize what had been done. I had no doubt that my father had intended to write a message to me—to tell me no doubt that this man was not my husband. In his dying moments his unfulfilled purpose had haunted him.

"I cannot tell the stifling sensations which fol-

lowed the sudden realization that this writing on the wall would be taken as an accusation against the man who had done his best to ruin us both.

"When this awful idea first came to me, I fled from the room, as if by so doing I could leave the idea behind me. I actually had opened the outer door to call help when the full realization of all that my false husband had done to me rushed over me with renewed force. I stopped still and my heart was steeled to every cry of conscience. As fully possessed of my faculties as I ever was in my life, I stood at the door and thought of everything—of the chances of the success of this terrible revenge for my wrongs; of my ability to carry out the plan; of the fact even that once embarked in it there could be no drawing back; that I could never survive the disgrace of discovery. 'Revenge,' I say, now; but that night the word in my mind was 'justice.' Would this act of mine immolate Albert Runyon in a greater degree than he had sacrificed me? No—and this to my mind that night was 'justice!'

"This reflection sealed my fate. I went back resolutely. I assured myself that my father was dead beyond all recall. I replaced the cartridges in the drawer whence he had taken them. The fatal pistol still lay upside down firmly wedged in its place, with its barrel laid across the corner pointing outward at an upward angle. The hammer had caught upon the ornamental scroll work just above the drawer as it fell. To such a point were my faculties sharpened by the danger and the boldness of my designs that I noted every detail of these facts. I knew that this pistol was the only testimony to the real facts of my father's death.

"I put the pistol in my pocket, turned out the lights, and stole from the chamber of death with the full realization that I had made myself a criminal.

"It is unnecessary for me to tell what followed;

of the clearer realization of my position that came with reflection; of the awful complication in which I found I had involved myself and my innocent sister; of my bitter remorse when it was too late. May Heaven have mercy on me.

"MARION NORTH."

"COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS,
"ESSEX, *ss.*
"SWAMPSCOTT, *June* 26, 1887.

"Then personally appeared before me the above named Marion North, who made oath that the foregoing statement, by her submitted, is true.

"WILLIAM FLETCHER,
"*Justice of the Peace.*"

"That is all, gentlemen," said Thomas, as he folded the document—"all that is written here. I hardly need say that I do not subscribe to the lady's idea of her father's purpose in writing his partner's name on the wall. She takes a view lenient as possible to him. But to my mind that he carried a full intention of revenging himself upon his recreant partner from the moment he set out to load that pistol with the intention of shooting him, to the moment of his death, is the only logical construction to be placed upon his conduct. And I unhesitatingly put North at the head of the conspiracy. His daughter—unfortunate woman!—let his purpose be carried out by concealing the evidences of the accident. In the sequel we see the mockery of fate; for in the end it is not Stackhouse, but Richard Fetridge, who is arrested for the crime."

And, indeed, Thomas's view of the case was the theory which came eventually to be accepted by all cognizant of the facts, and though it may not be

quite possible to determine beyond a doubt the intent of Paul North in writing upon the wall, still Mr. Thomas's conclusion, that a deadly purpose of revenge filled the mind of the dying man, must be, in lieu of something better, accepted as final.

The profound silence which immediately followed the reporter's words was broken by Fetridge, who had been sitting with his hand shading his eyes during the latter portion of the reading.

"And to think," he murmured, "that it was for this end I have been trying to keep this scandal from the public ear! Why, it will be worse, a thousand times worse," he exclaimed, starting up, "than if I had precipitated the facts as I knew them. Then it might have been hushed up. Now that is impossible."

"If you had but had a little confidence in me!" said John Lamm reproachfully. "Well, Inspector, what's to be done?"

He asked the question a little maliciously.

"How do we know that this statement is true?" exclaimed Applebee, who was but just recovering from his breathless amazement. "Fortunately this woman is already under arrest, and—"

"Ah, pardon me," interrupted Thomas, solemnly. "She is not, inspector."

"Not arrested!" exclaimed the astonished official.

"You do not know that woman," said the reporter with a sigh, "or you would have guessed the truth already. Marion North could not survive such a disclosure."

"She is dead!" cried Fetridge, with bloodless lips.

"She is dead," repeated the reporter. "Soon after the witnessing of this document she complained of feeling weak, and expressed a desire to lie down. A little later her sister came to me, greatly alarmed. Marion was breathing strangely, she said, and her face had changed color. I suspected the truth and hastened after a physician. When he commenced his examination he found this little bit of paper in her bosom:

" 'For God's sake, conceal my disgrace! I have poisoned myself.' "

Richard Fetridge uttered a groan, sank into his chair, and buried his face in his hands.

"The physician privately informed the officers who came to arrest her," continued the reporter, "that she had been summoned before a higher tribunal."

And Richard Fetridge could only murmur—

"Heaven pity her and me! God have mercy on us both."

And so the great case came to an end. Thomas succeeded in keeping all but the most meager details from the curious gaze of the public. It was not in his province to suppress news, but, as John Lamm said—

"A man will do a great deal for the sake of the woman he thinks enough of to marry."

THE END.

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